

Measures

by Gary Justis

Pascal was a kind man. To me, he was king of the goodhearted fellows on our crew. He was from the state of Nuevo León, where his family had farmed for centuries. There was a confidence and strident courage in the way he pounded nails, or the way he carefully measured lumber with his folding yardstick.

“Hey Pascal, I’ll sell you my old tape measure for a dollar.”

Our boss was always trying harder than most men on our crew to get into Pascal’s head. Boss could sense a quality of mind that wasn’t apparent to most folks.

Pascal would let something slip now and then. He was sharp and spoke excellent English, with a beautiful Spanish accent. He corrected speech among the guys, but he exercised his lessons in grammar with an eloquence that fascinated all of us, not letting anyone take offense. He painted images in our minds with such clarity that we would remember his stories as movies, not as spoken words.

Pascal would tease Boss back.

“I have the last of the folding yardsticks...the first and only remaining descendent of the Smithsonian’s standard. So Boss... no thanks. I want to be able to build this house and not return to troubles and *bad measures*...”

“What the hell is *bad measures*?”

Paley was a framer, and a fine cabinet-maker. He used to ask everyone on the crew how Pascal did some of his carpentry tricks.

Pascal lowered his head, as if he were praying quietly to himself. After a long pause, he raised his head and looked at Paley.

“The good measures are the ones that make the future owners, the family, the children who live here, not question the contentment they will feel through the years in this house. They are happy, but they do not know it...

Bad measures are ones out of which the buildings of discord are made. The corners, planes, surfaces and other details are destined to never match. This will make unhappiness come to this house, and to whoever chooses to live here. So I will always measure twice and again, so that the people who live in my houses will never know discord and *bad measures*. As my grandfather built my house of contentment, so will I, until I can no longer lift my hammer.”

All the guys were silent, most of them shyly looking down. Boss was smiling.

Paley looked up with a twisted grin.

“Hey Pascal, where did you buy that yard-stick thing?”

