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### **This Is The Only House You Will Ever Really Live In - Build It Right The First Time**

#### ***REFLECTIONS* by...**

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Education, Training & Career Development Coach

I've met a lot of people over the course of my lifetime. Some I remember with fondness and some I would rather forget.

While I was working as the Director of Public Relations for the Hanmer Valley Shopping Centre, I met a quiet, unassuming gentleman who has taught me a lot more about life than he can ever imagine. I want to share his story with you.

John Lancia was the custodian of the shopping center. He retired at the end of March after a career that spanned 27 years. What is most remarkable about this man is that he is 77 years old. His working life has included 15 years with the railway, 20 years in the mines, and 27 years working for Mr. Val Mazzuca at the mall.

During the retirement party which was held for him I thought back to a story I once read. Let me share it with you before I go any further about John.

#### **THE CARPENTER'S GIFT**

This story is about an elderly carpenter who was ready to retire. He told his employer-contractor of his plans to leave the house building business and live a more leisurely life with his wife enjoying his extended family. He would miss the paycheck, but he needed to retire. They could get by.



The contractor was sorry to see his good worker go and asked if he could build just one more house as a personal favor. The carpenter said yes, but in time it was easy to see that his heart was not in his work. He resorted to shoddy

workmanship and used inferior materials. It was an unfortunate way to end his career.

When the carpenter finished his work and the builder came to inspect the house, the contractor handed the front-door key to the carpenter. "This is your house," he said, "my gift to you."

What a shock! What a shame! If he had only known he was building his own house, he would have done it all so differently. Now he had to live in the home he had built none too well.

## **JOHN'S HOUSE...**

As I watched John going around the room, being congratulated by some of his close friends and family, and as I listened to the speeches that reflected upon this man's life, I realized how easy it is for us to fall into the same trap as the carpenter in the story. So often we build our lives in a distracted way, willing to put up less than the best. So often at work we are content with giving a mediocre performance and not giving the job our best effort. And then we are shocked when we look at the situation we have created and realize we are now living in the "house we have built".

We should all think of ourselves as the carpenter. Each day we are building our house. Everything we do is like hammering another nail, placing a board or erecting a wall. We should take care and build it wisely. It is the only life we will ever build. Even if you live for only one more day, that day deserves to be lived graciously and with dignity.

I looked over at John. He was overwhelmed with the attention he was receiving from his employer, his friends, from former mayors and other people who held esteemed positions in the community. John Lancia – a custodian – receiving all of this attention from so many important people.



John spent the evening thanking everyone for making the evening so special. He and his wife, Chummy came to see me the following week to ask me if I could put something in The Vision Paper to express their appreciation to everyone who came to the party.

When he left my office I thought back to the party. Over 100 people gathered together. They were not there to say good bye and give their best wishes to a custodian. They were there to pay tribute to a "master carpenter". A person who treated everyone he met with respect. A person who couldn't do enough to help other human beings – friend or stranger. A person who never thought about what he could get out of life, but what he could give to life – what he could give to others. A person who was totally committed and focused on his family.

I will extend your expression of appreciation to everyone who came to your party, John. But on behalf of everyone who has ever met that, friendly and helpful custodian at the Hanmer Valley Shopping Centre, I also want to thank you, John, for showing us how to build our own house. You gave us a gift that will last forever. Everyone of us who came to your party were coming to admire the house you built – to extend our thanks to you, for allowing us to enter your "house" and seeing what can be done when you put your heart and soul into every day of your life.

Our life today is the result of our attitudes and choices in the past. Our life tomorrow will be the result of our attitudes and the choices we make today. All we can hope for is to be able to one day live in a house as wonderful as John Lancia's. And so the message for all young students is pretty clear. As you go through life, make sure that you give your best effort at all times. Live life to the fullest. You are building your own 'house' with everyone you meet and with every action. People are watching you. They want to see what kind of 'carpenter' you are. Make sure you are proud of 'your house' - it's the only one you'll ever have.