

BY CHERYL CUDDEBACK

BY CHERYL CUDDEBACK



DOING MORE WITH LESS

He worked as a meat packer, was thrown out of Harvard not once but twice and may have lived in Forest Hills Gardens. Who was this man? A rich kid gone bad? A poor kid who got lucky? Just like his life, he was a man of extremes. Some of you have heard of him. Most of you have not. His name: Richard Buckminster Fuller; inventor, visionary and the list goes on.

MEMORY LANE

If you recognize the name it may be because he's frequently quoted on www.quotes.com. He's more widely known for inventing the Geodesic Dome which he didn't. In his first book he introduced himself as "the world's most successful failure."

Robert Buckminster Fuller was born in 1895. Despite suffering from farsightedness from birth, young Bucky showed his aptitude for logic when he constructed a ball of interlocking equilateral triangles using dried peas with toothpicks. On paper he was uneducated. He never graduated from college yet managed to receive 47 honorary degrees.

When he was 27 he sunk into a deep depression. After losing his construction business coupled with the death of his 4-year old daughter, he drank heavily and tried killing himself. Luckily Fuller experienced a sort of spiritual awakening. As the story goes, he was walking along Lake Michigan, pondering the words, "Buckminster Fuller—life or death," when:

"...A voice spoke to him. "You do not have the right to eliminate yourself," it said. "You do not belong to you. You belong to the Universe."

Thereafter he dedicated his life to making a difference in the world. He wrote on the deplorable conditions of the current construction industry. He believed the poor construction of the ghetto apartment his family was living in was the cause of his daughter's death. His solution was a revolutionary method of home building he called the "New Era Home". He envisioned a self-cleaning house that could be built in one day, then packed up, transported and built elsewhere. He edited his journal into a booklet called "4D Timelock" and sent it to several of the new industrialists of the day; such as Henry Ford. Fuller's observations paid off. The Marshall Field Department Store picked up on his ideas by exhibiting Fuller's 4D Houses. Their advertising team coined the name Dymaxion, from the words 'dynamic' 'maximum', and 'tension'. The name stuck and was used for other Fuller creations; such as the Dymaxion Car, a three-wheeled automobile that could run on 53 miles per gallon, and the Dymaxion Map; a distortion-free, Two-dimensional world map which could show the

shortest air routes between land masses. Fuller predicted air travel would replace sea travel.

What does Buckminster Fuller have to do with Forest Hills? A kitchen. Earle L.C. Guyon, the developer of the Tennis View apartments also designed the "One Wall Kitchen of Beauty." What looked like a wall of cabinets was really a front for a sink, dish rack, refrigerator and stove. He produced 1000 of them. How Guyon and



Fuller met is a mystery. My guess is it has something to do with Fuller's business, registered as Geodesic Inc. of Forest Hills, Long Island. Fuller wanted to incorporate Guyon's kitchen into Minneapolis's mass production of his Dymaxion House. Unfortunately, Hubert Humphrey, the city's mayor at the time, had to shelve the project.

But what happened to all those kitchens? No one knows for sure. In 1992, the curator of the Henry Ford Museum began a quest to find one and incorporate it into the Dymaxion House that was currently on display. One of Guyon's kitchens was finally located in the very building he developed during the early 1900's, in an apartment once occupied by Lyla Wilson Harrison at 4 Dartmouth Street. Several years ago I had the pleasure of meeting Harrison's daughter, Louise. When I told her my kitchen story, Louise shared that the kitchen's value to a museum was a "real head-banger for mom, since she struggled, cursing in her inimitable way, with those heavy metal drawers, all stuck and jammed with years of paint, for so long." I also learned that Lyla just also happened to be the daughter-in-law of Shelby M. Harrison, a director of the Russell Sage Foundation, who was partially responsible for the creation of Forest Hills Gardens. I remember Mrs. Harrison as the lady who told fortunes during The Gardens' Annual Children's Day Celebration. The longest lines of kids waited outside her tent. Inside we were dazzled by a beautiful woman dressed up in colorful gypsy regalia who read our palms and told us we'd meet the person of our dreams and make lots of money.

Fuller is also credited with inventing the geodesic dome. Yet it was Walter Bauersfeld of Germany who first created the dome to support astrological projectors. Fuller was more interested using domes for living purposes. Some domes were made to float to remedy the depletion of fertile land while others could be built over

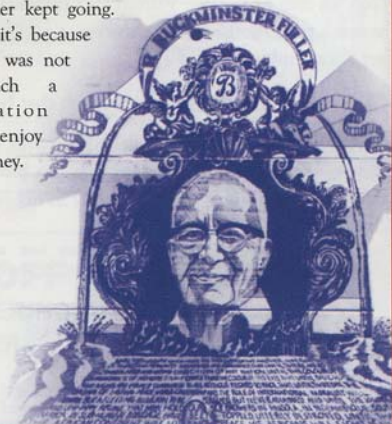
cities to control climate. The most famous of his domes was the U.S. Pavilion at the Montreal Expo in '67.

Walter O'Malley, owner of the Brooklyn Dodgers, even approached Fuller. He wanted a geodesic dome built as part of a new ballpark to be located at Flatbush and Atlantic Avenue in Brooklyn. According to O'Malley, "I'm not interested in just another baseball park." O'Malley was unable to secure the property so he moved his team to California.

What kind of man was Fuller? He was a man who saw potential in all the elements. He's remembered for saying "garbage is a resource out of place." He also had a flair for story telling. Buckminster's daughter, Allegra Fuller, remembers when she was a little girl, her father telling her the story of Goldilocks and the Three Bears transporting her, "not to the Bear's house, but to the universe, to help me understand something of Einstein's Theory of Relativity".

Fuller died of a heart attack at the ripe old age of 87 in 1983. During his life Fuller authored 28 books, received numerous architectural and design awards and was even nominated for the Nobel Peace Prize. He dedicated his life looking to improve humanity. Was he successful? Where did his far-fetched domed architecture and his all too practical solutions for living on earth ever get him? Most of his projects were failures. On its maiden drive, the Dymaxion car was in an accident, the manufacturer of the Dymaxion bathrooms stopped mid-production and the Dymaxion Deployment Units, designed to provide portable shelter, failed because of a steel shortage around WWII.

Yet, Fuller kept going. Perhaps it's because his goal was not to reach a destination but to enjoy the journey.



FOREST HILLS CELEBRITY & ENTERTAINMENT • AUGUST / SEPTEMBER 2008