

## CHAPTER ONE

# Fred

I don't remember the exact day, but I do know it was in the spring of 2006 when she first drove by the corner of my busy street. "Please tell my story," I pleaded, "before it's too late." For the first time, I thought maybe someone heard me because her black Toyota slowed down and she turned her head, briefly staring at me.

Year after year, I waited for her to come back. Then in 2012, she returned and parked in front of me.

In the beginning, I was called Building 1469 and my author called me an orphan because I was in terrible condition. Early on, my name was given to me by her childhood friend who has been able to connect with the past. Having a name and being valued by a stranger is powerful. But what I've learned over the past hundred and twenty-one years is that you can never underestimate anyone's history, including mine.

We all have stories to tell, and I am lucky to be alive to share mine. I am one out of thousands of apartment buildings throughout America with untold stories. Many of my wealthy counterparts are lucky because their histories are already valued. My stories have been lost in the shuffle of time. I often ask myself why are they important? Maybe it's because I'm among the oldest apartment buildings still standing on the West Side of Buffalo, New York.

Recently, many of "Fred's Friends" have emerged to tell stories of their experiences in my building and neighborhood. These friends are a

core group of people who believe it is my mission to share my tales. They also include former neighbors who lived across or down the street from me decades ago and were all interviewed by Fran, my author, and her researchers. Each person they talked to had agreed to become one of “Fred’s Friends.”

I’d describe myself as a modest four-story apartment building licensed to have a business on the first floor, along with a separate apartment. There are two apartments on each of my top three floors. My architecture is early Twentieth Century Commercial style. I am plain, with a flat appearance and panels of light-colored brick laid in patterns. I’ve been able to provide my tenants shelter, a little space, and some comfort. There have been love affairs, reunions, and heroism within my walls. I’ve witnessed the tragedies, joys, hopes, and dreams of my tenants and their families. I learned that it doesn’t matter who we are or where we come from, we all have experiences to share.

As I grew older, I felt compelled to tell my story. Sometimes it was sad to see what became of me in my later years. In recent decades, I’ve been vulnerable to the weather and been a victim of many thefts to my structural integrity. My copper pipes have been ripped out, and the hole in my roof has damaged my interior. The traffic on Niagara Street comes and goes, mostly in a hurry, and now two new billboards clinging to the right-hand side of me generate income for my latest owner. At one point, vandals spray-painted my front bay windows in the middle of the night, but I’m still lucky because my legacy continues struggling to survive.

Young preservationists *heart-bombed* me on Valentine’s Day 2013 with paper hearts because I was a member of the city’s most endangered

buildings in desperate need of tender, loving care. This young group of advocates are heroes because they continue to educate the public on why many of our buildings and neighborhoods need to be saved. I'm lucky I made it on their list and was considered valuable and worth protecting for future generations. They have no idea how much I appreciate their efforts or maybe they will when they read this novel. My bay windows still have their flush lintels and protruding sills, and I am still strong with my three-foot-thick concrete basement walls and mostly solid original roof. Being heart-bombed made me feel important and brought back memories of someone special.

While I was being built, a young woman with a little boy cradled in her arms often stood in front of me, silently watching. Sometimes she talked briefly with the laborers and the builder, and I don't know how it happened, but I felt her affection toward me.

Whenever it rained or snowed, or if we had high winds, I'd see her sitting and looking out the window of the home nearest to my vacant side lot. I saw her smile and talk to her small child while pointing in my direction. Little did I know she would become my first owner—her name was Abigail.

It wasn't long before I referred to her as My Dear Abigail. Little did she know that when she was standing in front of me being built, I heard what she said out loud to her child. It was the beginning of my ability to listen and observe many of my tenants' lives without their knowledge. When Abigail looked up at me, she said, "You're my independence, hope, and financial security." I was shocked and desperately wanted to answer her, but it was impossible.

Later, I discovered she had me built on a wing and a prayer, and

without her, maybe I wouldn't still exist.

I'll never forget the day I was completed. It was later in the morning when I saw Abigail in her open window, crying and hugging her child. It was a great day when she moved into one of my third-floor apartments. Later, I learned that she'd paid \$1,200 for the parcel of land and \$6,000 for my apartment building. She was twenty-nine years old when my life began.

It's strange and exciting to be able to relate to my author. I wasn't only a singular apartment building. Through research and personal interviews by her and her researchers, they learned of my identical, narrow twin buildings that were constructed right next to me the year after I was built. I didn't really become an orphan until the 1950s when one of my twin buildings was set on fire and burned to the ground. A few years later, my surviving twin building was demolished. I'll never forget how we originally all stood out proudly in our residential neighborhood.

My apartment building faces Niagara Street on the corner of Potomac Avenue, and in the 1900s, Buffalo was booming and rapidly growing, including my neighborhood on the West Side. Luckily, I'm built next to the sidewalk's edge. It's the best of both worlds—living in a residential and industrial neighborhood.

I learned that what I do is called telepathy. It allows me to be able to communicate back and forth with Fran and her childhood friend, Mary, with the exception of one other person. My "Orphan Building" research team assists and does all the leg work along with my author and gathers feedback from the growing list of "Fred's Friends." We spent significant hours at the Buffalo Public Library researching who my original architect, builder, and owners were. Their excitement and enthusiasm

are contagious, and I can't wait for you to learn about my tenants.

Before we continue, I have to tell you about Edward F. Pickett, my architect, who was forty-two years old when he was hired to build me. He was a confident, spunky short first-generation Irish American. Edward's parents immigrated to New York City from Limerick, Ireland, in 1858. Edward's father worked as a laborer and his mother as a seamstress before they moved to Buffalo when he was two years old.

Jobs were plentiful in Buffalo, and the Pickett family wanted to save enough money to buy a house of their own. Edward's father, Patrick, easily found work with the Buffalo Street Railway Company. It wasn't long before his strong work ethic and willingness to work long hours enabled him to save enough money to purchase a two-family home on West Avenue.

Little Edward grew up to be just like his father and always challenged himself. He was a go-getter, and by 1895, he was employed by Bull and Brown, a local bicycle manufacturer located on Main and Chippewa Streets in the city of Buffalo. There, he became a department manager, a skilled bicycle machinist, and an inventor with many bicycle-related patents to his name. By 1896, he was vice president and secretary of the Non-Punctural Tire Company. Within a year, he was a draftsman for the Great Northern Elevator Company, a grain storage facility.

How Edward became Abigail's architect is an interesting tale. In the spring of 1898, Edward traveled by ferry to Fort Erie, Canada, for a large family reunion with all his Canadian relatives. By chance, he met Leon Edward O'Shannon, an Irish builder and friend of a distant cousin. They liked each other instantly because of their mutual love of bicycle touring. Before the reunion was over, both men agreed to meet in Buffalo and

planned on touring together on their identical Columbia bicycles.

On their first tour together, they traveled the road to Alden, mainly because it was straight and one of the best roads leading out of Buffalo. They continued to Warsaw and then took the road west of the Erie Railroad, which was always hard, smooth, and flat.

Little did they know that on their first tour together they would meet Louise Blanchard Bethune, the first woman architect in America. It was a beautiful day, and Edward, Leon, and Louise ended up sharing lunch together. They found out that Louise had bought the first woman's bicycle to go on sale in Buffalo and that she was an active member of the Woman's Wheel and Athletic Club. They had so much fun together that the three of them made sure to schedule more tours together.

In 1876, Louise took a job working as a draftsman in the local office of Richard A. Waite and F. W. Caulky, along with her husband Robert Bethune, before becoming an official architect herself five years later. Edward had a lot in common with Louise, mainly because they both learned the art of architecture while working inside a firm instead of inside a classroom.

Meeting Louise was a great diversion for both men, and they enjoyed seeing their new friend occasionally on the same bicycle tour. Actually, it's how they all became good friends. It also enabled Leon to discuss Abigail Goodwin's dilemma. He confided in Edward and asked him if he could please consider helping his best friend's sister. Leon explained that Abigail's husband, John, had returned to his family's farm on the Isle of Wight in England to care for his elderly parents, and his wife, Abigail, refused to go. He'd arrived in England right before she found out she was pregnant with his child. John sent her money monthly for a while but

suddenly stopped. It was when Abigail decided to buy an apartment building in Buffalo, New York, right over the border from Canada. She planned to rent an apartment in Buffalo until she could buy a building for herself.

Leon then told Edward that Abigail had been happy in Canada and never wanted to return to England with her husband and that he never wanted to return to America. John never forgave her for not returning to England with him and asked her for a divorce. When Abigail's Aunt Lillie died suddenly, she left her a considerable amount of money, saving her from poverty. It was then that she begged Leon to help her start a new life of independence in Buffalo, New York.