



SMALL MAN
The world my father made.

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artzpub.com



The world my father made.

F O R E W O R D

After a recent discourse with another visual artist about some of the things that my Dad had made over the course of his lifetime (at least with me anyways), I posted some rough shots via camera phone and uploaded them onto facebook.

Immediately Family members began recollecting about my father John Ambrose Kenwyn Rawlins. So I got out my old Nikon 995 and attempted to shoot his space, his legacies and the things that he had made in BW. Yep...black and white. It was how he lived his life. Sepia would have just been too clichéd. The photography is about the record, and the spatial relationships of the objects in his room. As much as possible I've tried to capture them in their own environments and places as he had left them. His work space is in a bit of a shambles now maybe, but the order in which he organized his "stuff" is still there. Be warned this journey back in time to discover things and see what's inside little cardboard boxes neatly packaged and labelled, under canopies of plastic, and tin foil wrappings is an unorganized discourse at best. I am in some ways like my father but the 'meticulous organization of things' is not one of those ways.

My father was first and foremost a good person, great father, toymaker, illustrator, model maker, grandfather, husband and public servant. This is some of his life.

OPPOSITE: Evening light falls over the deck of the HMS Ark Royal aircraft carrier. 1/16th scale model, balsa wood and assorted materials. My father never used kits to build anything. Despite not having had an engineering degree, he could read and understand any plan you put before him. His only degree was a 'PHD in commonsense'.

COVER: The workspace at night.



CHURCH

My father for most of his life only saw the inside of a church on a few key occasions. Allowances were made for Weddings, Funerals, Baptisms and if there are any others outside of those, you will simply have to ask my mother.

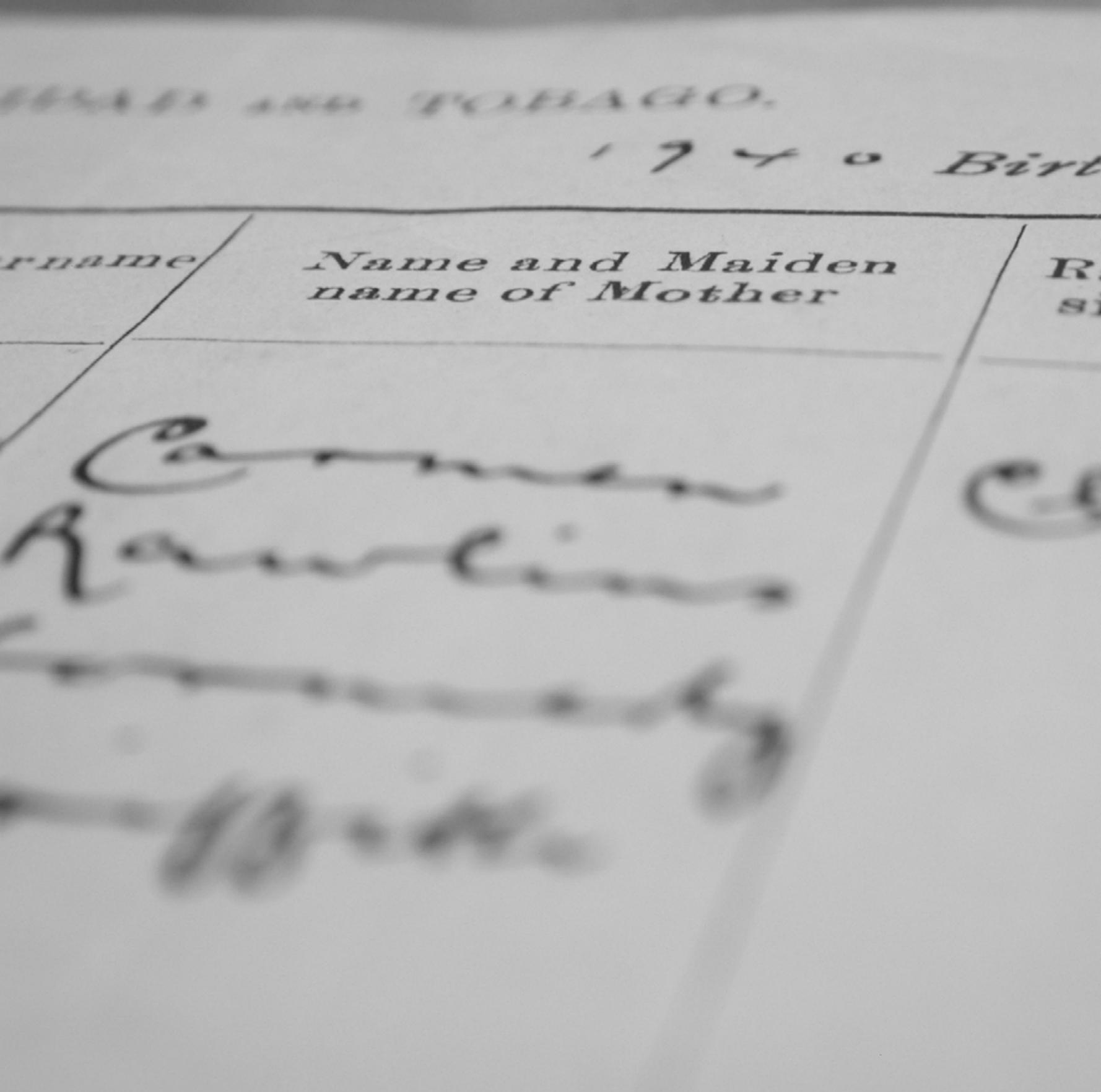
Born in 1940, he was baptised twice as he recalled in some “*simi-dimmie*”. He was first baptised as an Anglican. This was done by my grandmother to appease my grandfather’s family. They were Anglicans who it seems took offence at any apparent heir to the Rawlins throne being baptised as Catholic or anything else for that matter...’steupppss’. What would then follow would be a re-baptism in the Catholic church as per my grandmother’s wishes.

My grandfather’s family would have lots of problems today, for while our family today has no atheists, it certainly has it’s share (your writer not belonging to either of the following categories) of Catholics and Jehovah’s Witnesses.

Father wasn’t anti-anything. He was not superficial and often his distate for something came from a strong supportable opinion. Long before it became the ‘*cliché/ popular thing*’ to just dislike the Catholic church for disliking it sake, he had a grouse.

It seems he went to church one morning as a young lad and began feeling faint and subsequently fell down. The congregation was a bit hesitant to come to his aid immediately, and it coloured his thinking, at least where ‘church’ was concerned.

THIS PAGE: In his later years my father would decide what was to happen at his funeral. Among his things was a document curtailing who would sing what hymn and what music would be played. He was sent off in the Catholic church by a female lay-minister. This cross was taken from his casket. Yes, we save things in my family.



MONTAGE: Two Baptismal documents and a birth paper. John Ambrose Kenwyn Rawlins. 6th May, 1940. Legitimate. Boy. Randall Davidson Rawlins, Father and Carmen Rawlins formerly Griffith, Mother. Registered 10th May, 1940. house of Locality where born: 15 Baden Powell Street, Woodbrook.

Extractum EX LIBRO BAPTIZATORUM, in Ecclesia Sancti Patritii. John Ambrose Kenwyn Rawlins son of Randal and Carmen Rawlins. Baptised Catholic by Fr. B. O'Donnell. 22nd Aug. 1940. Sponsors: Oliver Marcelli and Winnifred Griffith.

BAPTISM SOLEMNIZED in the Parish Of St. Crispin In Trinidad In The Year Of Our Lord 1940. Baptised Anglican June 30th 1940. Christian Name: John Ambrose Kenwyn. Name Of Parents: Randal Davidson and Carmen Delysia Rawlins. Abode: 15 Baden Powell Street, Woodbrook. Sponsors or Witnesses: Cecil Kenwyn Gooding, Cecil Govia, Aletha Martin



SANDHURST

Once upon a time my father was a member of the British West Indian regiment. Born into a world at war and with a father and godfather that were in the volunteers it may have seemed inevitable that he would become a soldier.

My father had a penchant for military life, both Army and the Navy. This interest would spark his enrollment in the cadet force and would go on to have him eventually selected as one of the first three Caribbean people to be ever accepted to the prestigious Royal Military Academy Sandhurst for army officer training. Spencer, Buxo and Rawlins.

Academically sound and quite the military strategist, based on his in-depth knowledge of Military and Naval History, his candidacy for officer training was unquestioned. But alas as stories go, after a date had been set for departure to Sandhurst, two would go and not three. His offer of officer training was rescinded. This simple act was a crushing blow. This thing that he had worked for his entire life was removed. Spencer and Buxo would go on...he would not. If he could not be an officer, he would not remain in the army. He refused to continue.

He later noted that he did his job as a public servant well due in large part to his military background and undeniable discipline, but it was neither his passion nor his love. This disappointment lasted his entire life.

My mother's own perspective on this matter is quite simple. My father was never the sportsman or sociable type. His moral values and personal discipline dictated a non-involvement in certain activities: sports, liming and 'running woman'. She feels, and strongly so, that the removal of the offer was based purely on his inability to deal with the physical rigours of the training (which he found particularly hard) and his inability to accept the 'rank and file' over whom he would eventually have to preside.

OPPOSITE: A JUXTAPOSITION OF LIVES. Alan Sheppard's SANDHURST, sandwiched between his woodworking and wooden toy research and some naval books, BATTLESHIP SAILOR and the poignant THE FLEET THE GODS FORGOT.



READING

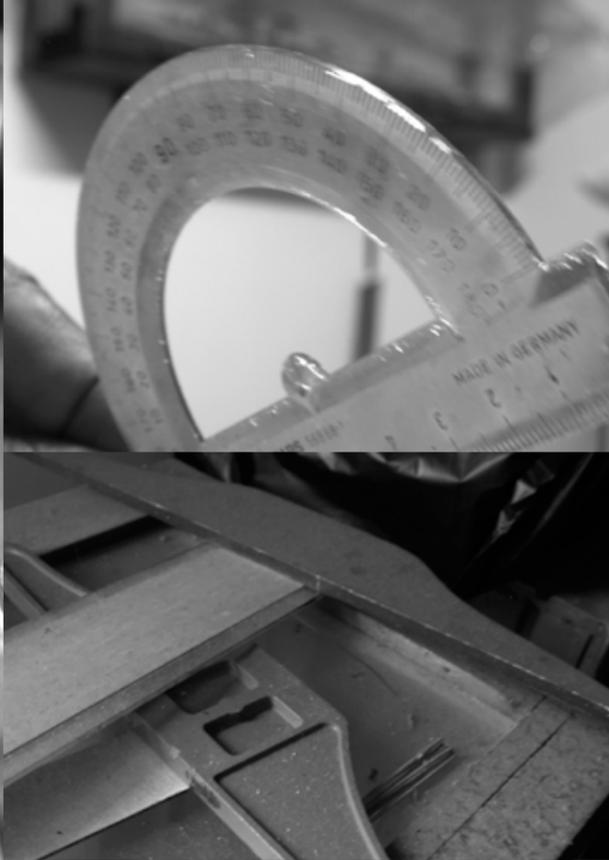
My family reads. They read alot. This self same reading would shape the ideologies of my father. In all of my 42 years (at time of writing), I never saw my father a day in his life without a book in his hand. A trip through his library would reveal two editions of George Orwell's Animal Farm, Reach for the Sky, Les Miserables, The Sand Pebbles, On The Beach, Great Expectations, A Tale Of Two Cities, Billy Bunter, William, Captain W.E. John's Biggles, countless Jane Military Aircraft and Fighting Ships books, National Geographic Magazines from as early as the 1900's, GILES cartoons, newspapers recollecting 'Man's first trip to the Moon', and somewhere in there 'Heroes of the Dark Continent'.

HEROES OF THE DARK CONTINENT

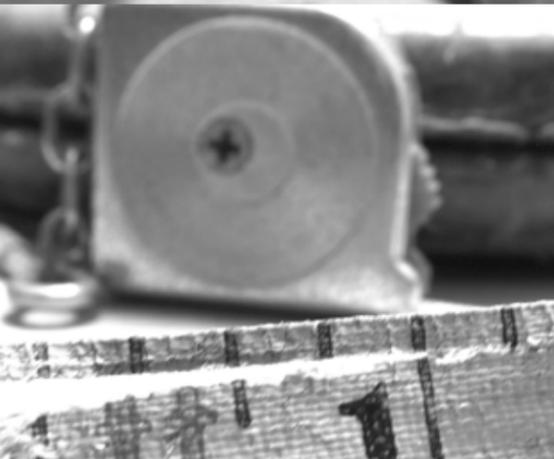
"Heroes of the Dark Continent," by J.W. Buel, published in 1890. It is a beautifully illustrated guide to the mysteries, legends and history of Africa. This book was my grandfather's prized possession. So protective was he of this yellowing and aging thing, that he wrapped it in countless layers of material and plastic bags to protect it, and slept with it under his mattress. When my grandfather thought that he was getting on in years he showed my father the secret hiding place. Upon his death my father retrieved the book from its secret place and then hid it in his room at home. Unfortunately my father died quite unexpectedly from a blod clot after contracting a light flu and never got around to showing me the location of the treasure. My search thus far has narrowed down its location to somewhere within the location of the last panel of this montage.



MONTAGE: Books, books and more books. Somewhere within this literary wilderness is the fabled "Heroes of the Dark Continent," by J.W. Buel.



MONTAGE: Old school geometry pans, compasses, protractors, rulers, small hammers, miniature, tape measures, a couple of T-squares (used exclusively by me for hockey purposes and failing technical drawing), an old Singer sewing machine (peddle harness used to support a makeshift table), tooth picks, lettering templates and other things.





MUSIC

I found this box of records amongst his things. Yes,...actual records. The 'Saxy Sounds of Ace Cannon, a multitude of classics...Strauss, Hooked on Classics One, Two and Three, Remembering the 40's Compilation, Lobo the Caribbean Disco Show, Super Blue, then called Blue Boy, the ever-PNM- loving Kitch's 'Not A Damn Seat For Them!', 'Music from the Lemon Popsicle Soundtrack' and then the strange ones.

My father had gone to England in 1981 and I distinctly remember the music he brought back. As he used to say, he was 'a square head' and 'what he liked he liked'. He would make no apologies for being a 'square head'. He had gone to a record store to get some music for himself, the 'Birdie Dance by the Tweets, Teddy Bear's Picnic', 'Yes we have no Bananas' and some music for his sons. Not having a clue as to what we were listening to, since for him everything was 'noise', that just 'drove him crazy', he asked the record store attendant for advice. The attendant offered up ELO (Electric Light Orchestra), and Adam Ant's 'Sex Music for Ant People'. We might have been in our early teens at the time. I've had a fascination with English Music ever since.

Later on some of our music would 'ketch on' and he would adopt 'Kim Carne's Betty Davis Eyes' as his own and play it to death. I couldn't find that one in the box though. Maybe we just broke it. And of course when Michael was just becoming the 'freak that we now know and fear', he held onto 'Beat It'. And there, low and behold in his box of records was 'Beat It', in the stack of 45s just below 'Lobo the Caribbean Disco Show' and right before National Geographic's 'Sounds of the Space Age'.

MONTAGE: Yes kids, before MTV and before it became the 'Music Industry', it was called the 'Record Industry'. We listened to vinyl with all it's hisses and pops and we loved it!



As I've always said, my dad made 'stuff'. Every Christmas our house was like Santa's workshop. My dad would be there working on the dining room table making and labelling neat little cardboxes that he built by hand to individually package each one of his 'wooden toy' Christmas gifts. His nephews, nieces and multitude of official and un-official godchildren would be the recipients of these gifts.

He was also a man set in his own unwavering way of doing things. He had always said 'he was making his path in the road and walking it'. One could expect no less.

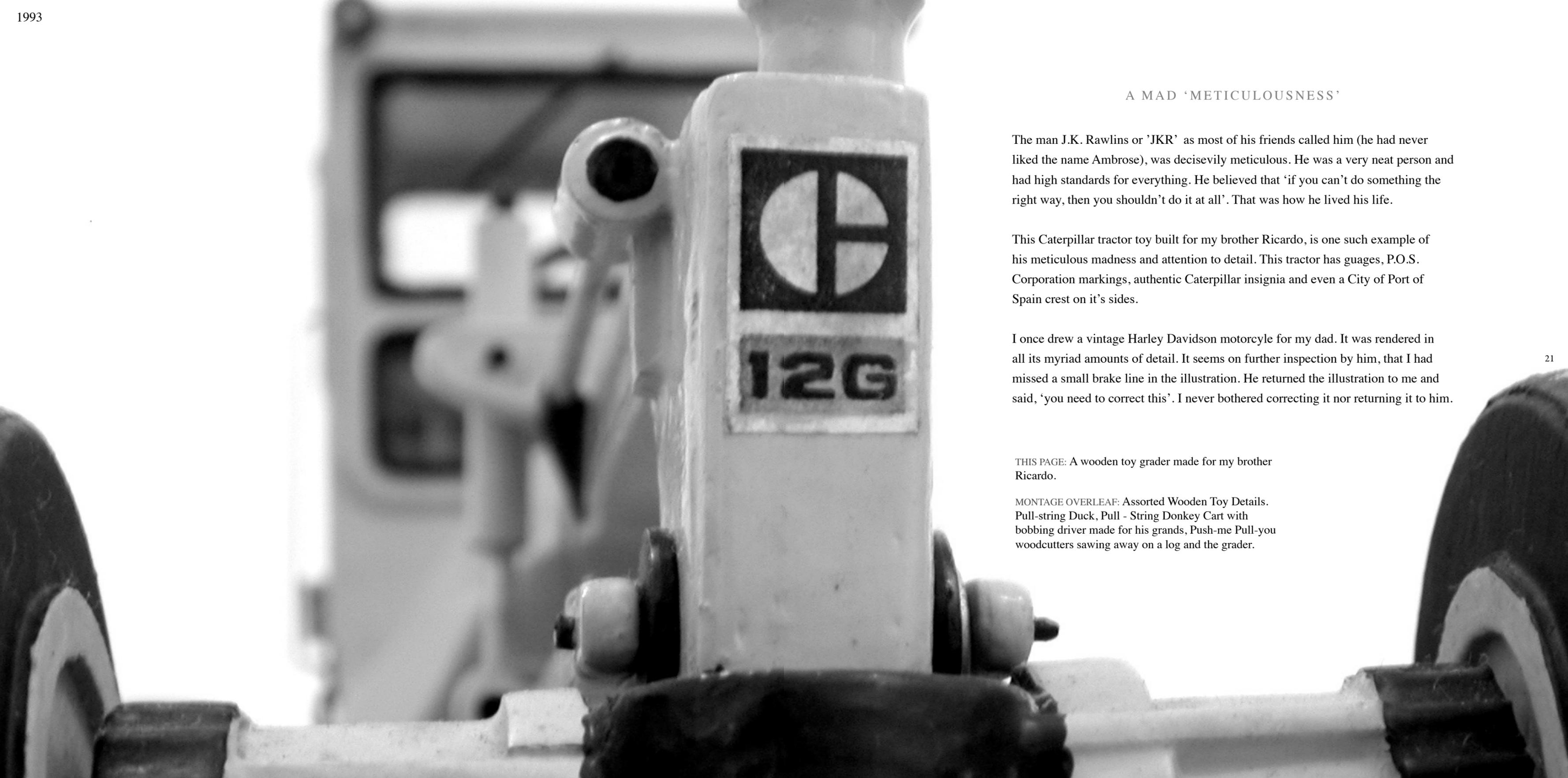
One year I approached him to make my nephew Kai a special gift. I had just been back from studies in Canada and was steeped in all my 'idealistic thinkings about the world and children and everything else'. I briefed my father. Please make me a wooden pull toy. Three elephants connected tusk to tail. The largest elephant must be blue, the second elephant must be pink, and the third and smallest elephant must be gray. Oh, and I wanted them to have individual wheels. I even drew a diagram of what I had wanted him to follow.

About a week later when he had finished, he presented me with the elephants. This is what he made. One toy with two elephants, four wheels, not connected tusk-to-tail in a tan coloured varnished wood finish. 'Only a drunk would see a pink elephant', he would say and furthermore 'elephants aren't blue!'. "Now take that and go.'

OPPOSITE: Acrobat toy made by John Ambrose Kenwyn Rawlins for his son Richard Rawlins

OVERLEAF: The Elephant Toy





A MAD 'METICULOUSNESS'

The man J.K. Rawlins or 'JKR' as most of his friends called him (he had never liked the name Ambrose), was decisively meticulous. He was a very neat person and had high standards for everything. He believed that 'if you can't do something the right way, then you shouldn't do it at all'. That was how he lived his life.

This Caterpillar tractor toy built for my brother Ricardo, is one such example of his meticulous madness and attention to detail. This tractor has guages, P.O.S. Corporation markings, authentic Caterpillar insignia and even a City of Port of Spain crest on it's sides.

I once drew a vintage Harley Davidson motorcycle for my dad. It was rendered in all its myriad amounts of detail. It seems on further inspection by him, that I had missed a small brake line in the illustration. He returned the illustration to me and said, 'you need to correct this'. I never bothered correcting it nor returning it to him.

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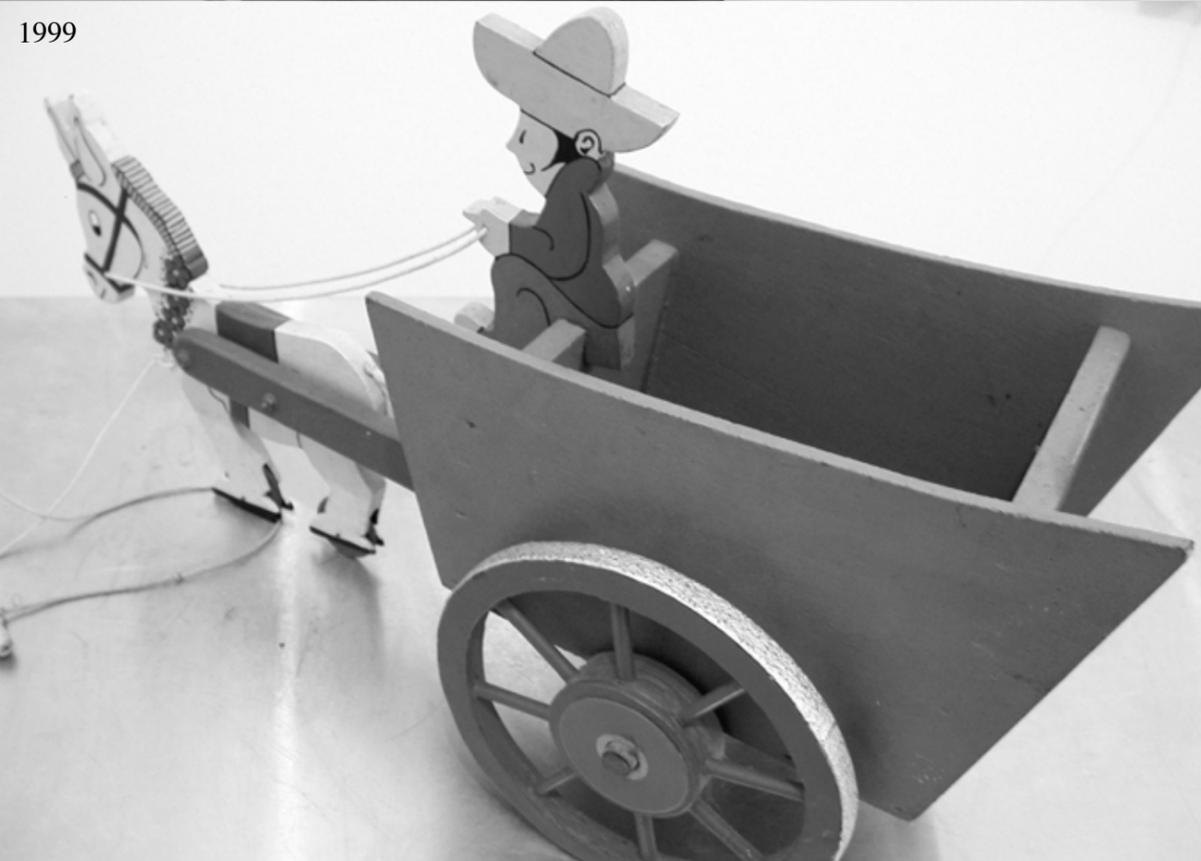
THIS PAGE: A wooden toy grader made for my brother Ricardo.

MONTAGE OVERLEAF: Assorted Wooden Toy Details. Pull-string Duck, Pull - String Donkey Cart with bobbing driver made for his grands, Push-me Pull-you woodcutters sawing away on a log and the grader.

1997



1999



1995





OF BENCHES BIG AND SMALL

My father passed away about two years ago and among his legacies were two benches that he made for the purposes of watching mas on Carnival days, painting around the house, and having his grandchildren sit beside him when he was building something in his workshop. He left quite a few such legacies; countless wooden toys, a huge 1940's style dollhouse for my mom and a playhouse for my 3 children. But the bench is the thing that they all fight over, (well the younger two...so much so that they wouldn't even share it for a photograph). My 'big cousin' Solange would claim she sat on it first. That didn't make it hers, but she still sat on it first.





HE BUILT STUFF PART 2

Between the years 1996 and 2000 my dad made lots of doll furniture. It would be all part of the creation of a splendid dollhouse for my mother Janet (in my estimation his greatest project ever).

These aforementioned years marked the births of my first two children. Ria Maya and Annissa respectively. During this time, my first wife Lystra was the recipient of a doll's furniture collection, bar none.

These magnificent pieces are cherished by her and kept all in their original boxes. She takes them out from time to time, to carefully and guardedly show them off then puts them back again. No one is to touch them under penalty of death.



ABOVE: Baldwin Piano, and living room furniture

OPPOSITE: Baldwin Piano, circa 1908, complete with music sheets and stool.

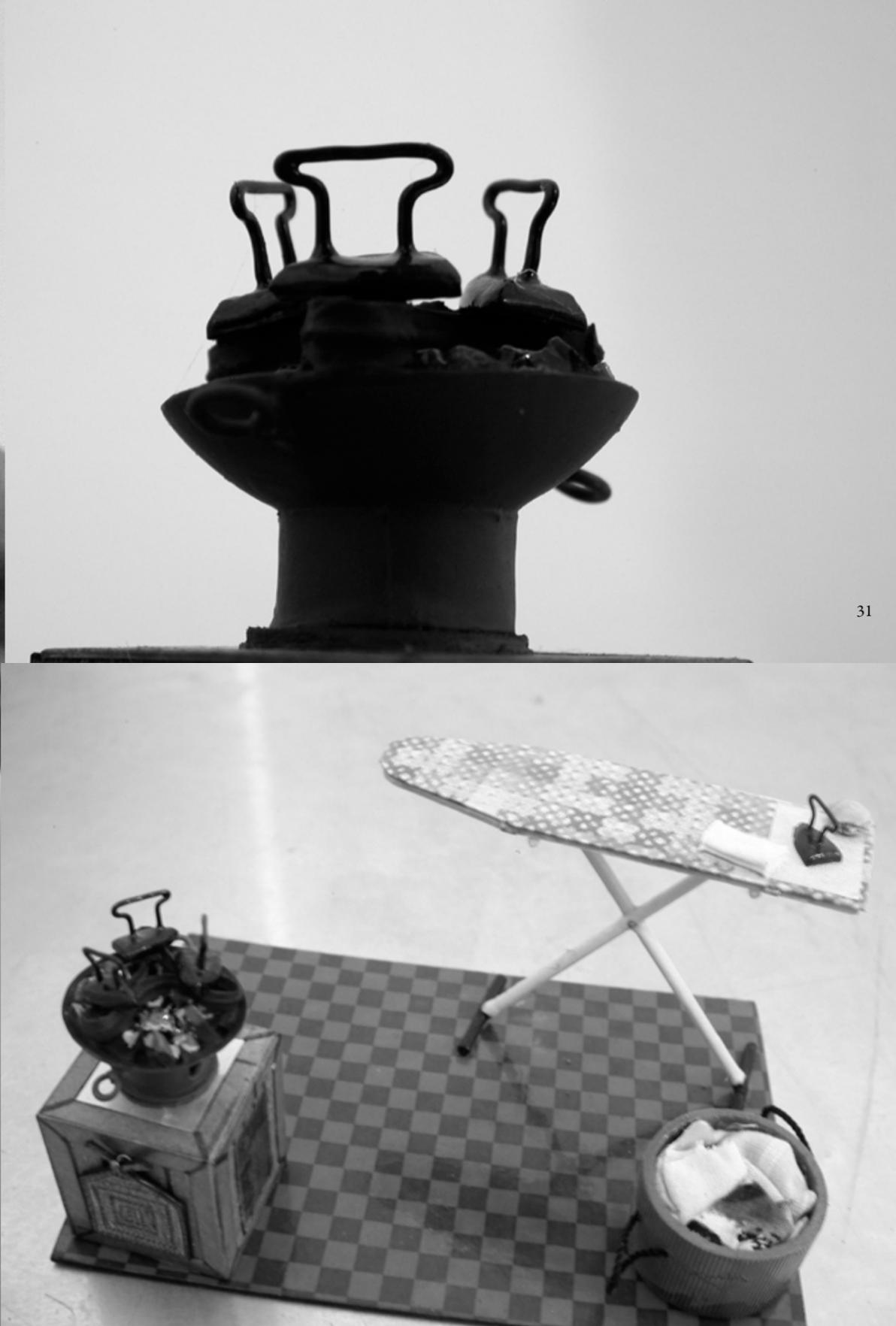


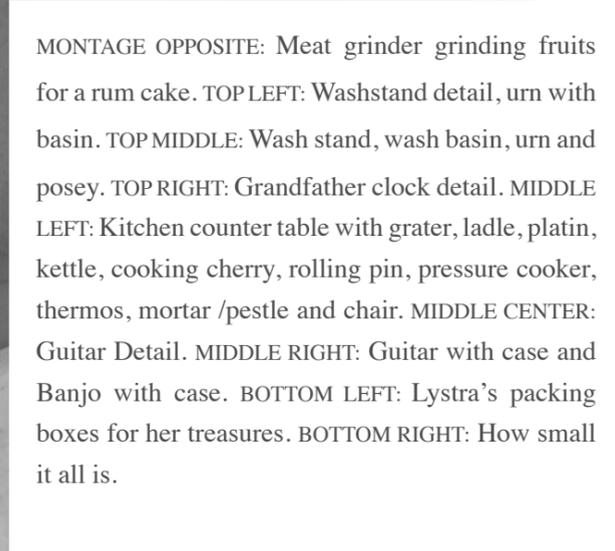
MONTAGE above and left: A kitchen of yesteryear. Our colonial past. Safe (ironic in these food security times) containing a sweet bread, decorated cake with cherry on top, and a three quarter sponge cake.

Three burner stove with oven on a bench complete with blackened frying pan.

Broken handled 'Chinese chopper', stuck in a chopping board block atop a kitchen stool.

OVERLEAF: Ironing board with 'coal pot irons' and clothes basket





MONTAGE OPPOSITE: Meat grinder grinding fruits for a rum cake. TOPLEFT: Washstand detail, urn with basin. TOPMIDDLE: Wash stand, wash basin, urn and posey. TOP RIGHT: Grandfather clock detail. MIDDLE LEFT: Kitchen counter table with grater, ladle, platin, kettle, cooking cherry, rolling pin, pressure cooker, thermos, mortar /pestle and chair. MIDDLE CENTER: Guitar Detail. MIDDLE RIGHT: Guitar with case and Banjo with case. BOTTOM LEFT: Lystra's packing boxes for her treasures. BOTTOM RIGHT: How small it all is.



THE MAN WAS A PRE-COLONIAL ROYALIST.

My father was an unabashed ‘Royalist’. He would tell us stories of Buckingham, Sandringham, of Queen Victoria, the Queen Mother her beloved King George and of course Wallace and Mrs. Simpson. As I grew older I would be enthralled by the pictures of the young Queen Elizabeth at sixteen playing catch aboard a frigate with a midshipman slightly older than herself, her exploits as a mechanic and ambulance driver in the Second World War, Prince Charles as a child driving his miniature Rolls Royce, Corgis Frolicking on the lawn and the official ceremonial dress picture of the Queen and her husband Prince Phillip. Also like much of the world we got up at 4am to witness the marriage of the ‘sloane ranger’ Diana Spencer, to Prince Charles. On a sidenote my mother (on whom a certain amount of the ‘Royalist’ thing would rub off), would later throw out her cherished Diana and Prince Charles commemorative wedding plates, when the marriage was over and Dodi Al Fayed moved in and she started hanging out with Prince Andrew’s wife, Fergie or rather ‘that scalawag’ (a name previously reserved for Princess Margaret) as my father called her.

OPPOSITE: The official ceremonial dress picture of the Queen and her husband Prince Phillip, hangs on my father’s workspace wall.



HE BUILT STUFF PART 3

It seems that my parents had gone to see a dollhouse exhibition put on by none other than 'legendary mas maker' Wayne Berkley. My father was not moved. He found the work boring and un-impressive. I think my mother had even suggested that if he could do better, he should. In 1986 my father took all of his accumulated leave and set about the task of building his wife, her very own doll's house.

The house set in all it's 'colonial glory' was completed within a year. It would consist of fully detailed rooms. The house had a master bedroom with four poster bed, night-tables, bible, almanac with Palm Sunday palm attached (an homage to his Catholic mother), and a pair of ladies' shoes on the rug at the side of the bed. The dining room had an ornate fruit basket arrangement on the dining table and the walls were filled with Rembrandts, the Mona Lisa and portraits of your author and his brother. The bathroom, complete with changing screen, bathtub, toilet, sink, and medicine cabinet even featured a 'girlie' calendar. The kitchen had all it's expected accessories, i.e. kitchen stove, hutch, basin with ice, ice pick, a 'tarcase ham', and even a full case of coca cola. The living room featured dumbwaiters as well as ornate furniture, an extensive bookcase, and a chess set stuck in mid game. The downstairs hall showcased a Singer sewing machine, a dressmaker's dummy with measuring tape and an old crank telephone, while the upstairs hall window end had a chair with a copy of National Geographic set upon it.

Details were everywhere. Everything was lovingly crafted, from the chandileers within, the weathervane and dormer windows atop, to the vintage motor in the carport and the 'Big Ben' bicycle leaning up against the house.

Of all the stuff my father built, this would remain his greatest creative accomplishment.



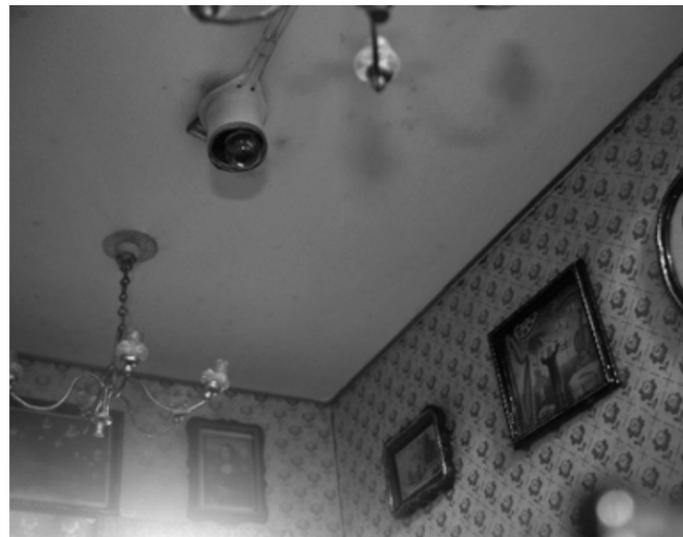
LEFT PAGE TOP L-R:
The Bathroom, sink detail, toilet detail

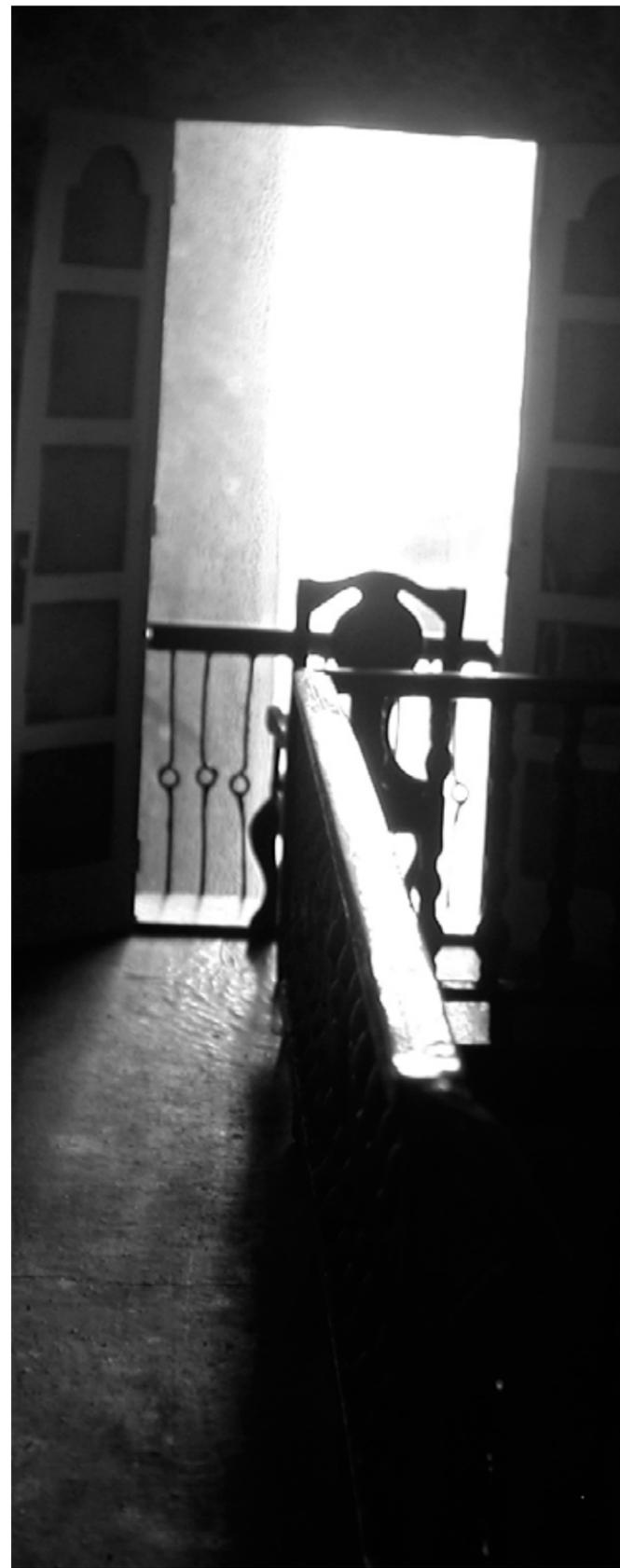
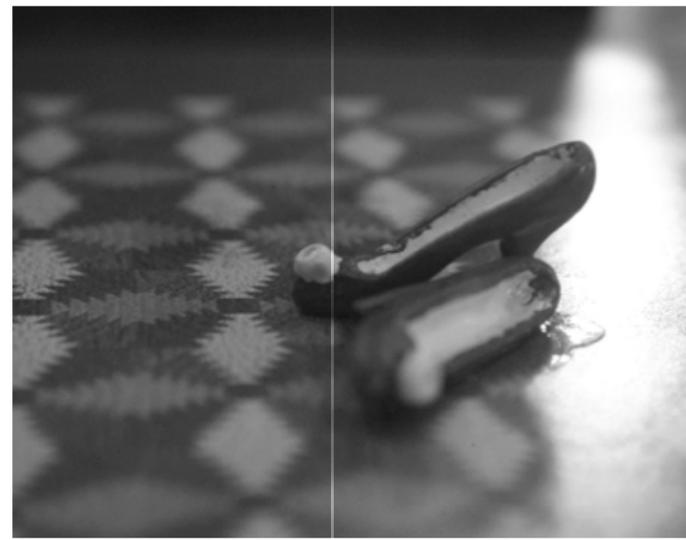
LEFT PAGE MIDDLE L-R:
Coca Cola case detail, basin with ice pick and
old time ice cream maker, the kitchen in it's entirety, kitchen
table detail of toaster

LEFT PAGE BOTTOM L-R:
Wall paper detail with picture of the author, the dining room
table with fruits on table, ceiling detail showing chandileer

THIS PAGE BOTTOM TOP & BOTTOM

Wall paper detail with picture of the author, the dining room
table with fruits on table, ceiling detail showing chandileer
and Salvador Dali painting.





LEFT PAGE TOP L-R:
The Four Poster Bed, almanac with Palm Sunday cross
palm, a pair of ladies' shoes
LEFT PAGE MIDDLE L-R:
Attic detail with tricycle, pram and golf clubs, golf clubs,
outer-house wall detail
LEFT PAGE BOTTOM L-R:
Camera on tripod, harp and christmas tree detail, rocking
chair with guitar
THIS PAGE
Hall and railing detail





HE BUILT STUFF PART4

In my own estimation, the dollhouse he made for my mother was my father's greatest achievement. But were it up to him, his greatest achievement would certainly be the 'playhouse' he built for my children. Not a rich man by any means he had a concern about leaving a legacy for his grandchildren. This house was certainly that. Fashioned from an old packing case that once housed a neighbour's medical equipment, the playhouse would be every neighbourhood child's (and a good few adults too), dream. The aptly named 'OUR DREAM COTTAGE' can house four or five small children, dolls and assorted kitchen furniture. The walls are covered with a beautiful heart motif wallpaper, and the flooring covered in real linoleum. The cottage has three sets of windows that can be locked from the inside and also hooked in open position on the outside. The cottage's door makes use of an old wardrobe lock with a key simple enough to be handled without issue by a toddler. The whole house, set on castors, is easily movable for 'extreme play convenience'.

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THIS PAGE:

MAYA, ANNISSE and EMILY

"OUR DREAM COTTAGE"

NEXT PAGE: The cottage with its detailed faux stonework and clown faces.

NEXT PAGE CENTER TOP:

Interior detail of the playhouse showing windows and assorted toys

NEXT PAGE CENTER BOTTOM:

Wallpaper detail shot through rear window

NEXT RIGHT:

The happy occupants... Ria Maya and Annissa Marie





LEFT PAGE:

Detail of Model HMS Ajax

THIS PAGE:

Detail of his model of a ship's dockyard complete with submarines, destroyers, supply ships a barge and of course a drydock servicing a battle ship.



HE BUILT STUFF PART 5

Some may argue that this chapter should have been entitled 'HE BUILT STUFF PART 1', for this is what my dad made first. He model model ships. This love for the navy would travel with him throughout his entire life. For me though while it features, it remains the thing that was most about 'him and him alone'. While we could relate to all his other creations, unless you had a vested interest in the Royal Navy or my father's pursuits, you wouldn't get it.

He loved model building. He one day even told me of the time he won a model building competition while at Fatima College. He was in his glee at the fact that his 'hand-built-from-scratch battleship' won out against a field of 'PRE FABRICATED AMERICAN MODELS'.

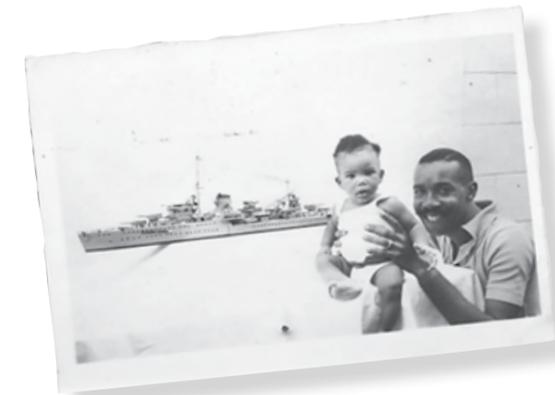
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But I think the most interesting story involves his brother Michael. In my remembrance of the said incident, my father on the odd occasion would sail his battleships in the pond at the Queen's Park Savannah. On this afternoon of sailing and photographing of his model his brother in an attempt to show off and embarrass my father in front of his friends jumped on the model and broke it. My father promptly and soundly split Uncle Michael's head open with his camera. The rest of the story would involve my uncle being taught 'a lesson in provocation' and being made to ride to the Port of Spain General Hospital on his bicycle to receive stitches. While the scar of the wound would last for sometime. The guilt of what he done would last my Uncle a lifetime.

Yes, funny thing about my family. They have a problem 'letting go of stuff'.

My father was first and foremost a good person, great father, toymaker, illustrator, model maker, grandfather, husband and public servant...

this is some of his life.



My Daddy and Me.



RICHARD RAWLINS is a Graphic Designer/Photographer/
Artist/Creative Director, working in advertising for the last twenty years.
Rawlins is the publisher of the online magazine
Draconian Switch (www.artzpub.com)

His last showings were in 2007 for for the Radical Design Jeans Art Project
where he exhibited his work '**SPEAK UP**' and for 2009's Trinidad and Tobago's
EROTIC ART WEEK with showings at multiple locations: CMB Annex
Gallery showing of '**OUT OF CONTEXT**' (a book and video animation of
'real life' booty call text messages) and '**NO ONE CARES**' acrylic on canvas
board; he also showed '**SPACE FOR RENT**', an installation at Brooklyn Bar.

He is currently exploring the writing of really bad spoken word poetry, ('**This
Ting This Ting**' written with Dave Williams and peformed by Indra Ramcharan
for Erotic Art Week Spoken Word event) as a medium of expression.

He is and most importantly, the father of three beautiful girls.