

Doll House Builder Finds Exacting Hobby Therapeutic

BY DOUG RUTTER

For a man who spent 25 years in the fast-paced, ulcer-breeding world of commercial advertising in New York City, Bill Geller Jr. has a strange hobby.

As a professional photographer, Geller used to crank out two or three high-profile projects per week.

Now he spends his free time turning out tiny pieces of doll house furniture—one every month or so.

"It started off with a drawer," he says, using a fingernail to tug at a drawer handle on a three-inch-tall dresser. "I built around the drawer, and this is how it all started."

From one drawer, just large enough to store a small pack of matches, the gray-haired Shallotte man has gone on to build about 20 beautiful pieces of miniature furniture.

They'll someday take their place in a stately, Victorian doll house that Geller has been working on for the past 18 months.

Strangely, Geller is going to all this trouble for a granddaughter who hasn't even been born yet. In fact, there may never be a granddaughter.

"I started on the doll house about four years ago when my daughter got pregnant and I thought I was going to have a granddaughter," Geller explains. "I ended up having a grandson, but I'm still working on it."

Geller says he isn't putting any pressure on his daughter, who lives in New Jersey, to have a little girl of her own. "I'm not pushing it. It will be a few years yet."

Even if Geller never sees that granddaughter, he won't feel his time has been wasted. He finds shaping pencil-size pillars for the Victorian's front porch and building pocket-size hope chests can be therapeutic.

It keeps his mind and hands busy. "In lieu of watching TV and what they have to offer today, I spend my time out here," Geller says, sitting on a stool in his cramped workshop.

Like the masterpieces he creates from quarter-inch scraps of poplar and red oak, Geller's work space is almost miniature.



BILL GELLER JR. put in about 60 or 70 hours of work on each of these pieces of doll house furniture.

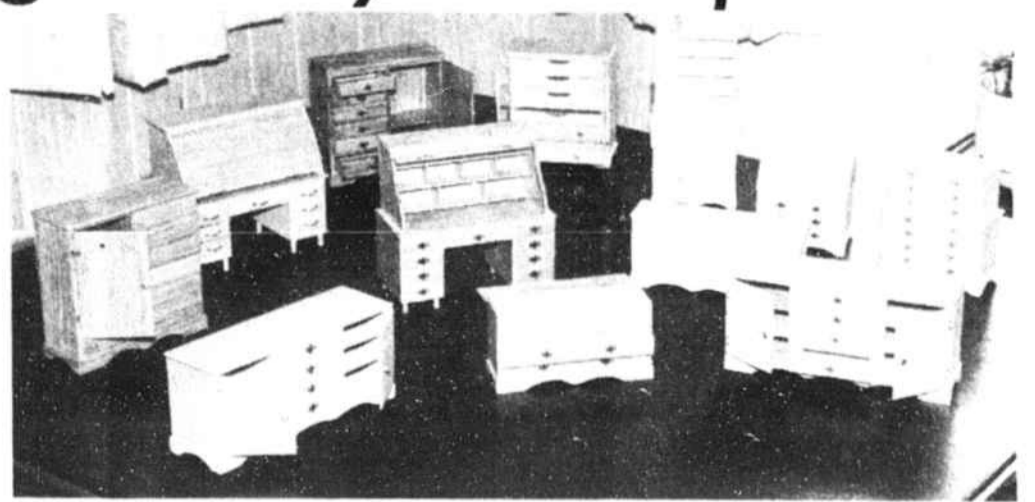
He spends as many as 20 hours per week in a corner of his parents' garage in Briarwood Estates, cutting wood on a band saw and shaping on a lathe.

Geller estimates it takes 60 to 70 hours to build a teeny-weeny, roll-top desk from scratch. "A lot of time is spent setting up, then you cut a few pieces and set up for

something else."

Most of his work is done on a basic, 10-inch band saw and a lathe with a milling attachment that is made especially for intricate work like doll house construction.

"You can work relatively precise, which you could never do with a large piece of equipment," he says of the lathe. "It's the



POPLAR AND RED OAK were used to make these dressers, desks and other miniature furnishings

mainstay. Everything boils down to one motor."

Geller got the house plans from an Atlanta-based company that puts out booklets that provide step-by-step instructions on how to build doll houses.

"There's a method to their madness," Geller points out. "You're supposed to do the basics and then order all the extras from them, which makes good business sense."

Geller has beat the system, in a sense, by building everything himself. He admits it would be cheaper to buy everything and spend his time in other productive ways.

But he obviously enjoys building everything himself to 1-12 scale.

When completed, this won't be any run-of-the-mill doll house. It will qualify as any doll's dream house, complete with tongue-in-groove oak floors and siding, an outside gazebo and a picket fence.

Geller is doing it all, including cutting and shaping the 1,400 thin pieces of wood it will take for the floors and siding. He's made columns for the front porch and built a staircase, doors and shutters.

The house will feature sliding windows made of thin Plexiglas. "I thought about real glass, but if it's for a kid they may break.

The mother may come after me with a lawsuit," Geller joked.

Indoor furnishings including dressers, hope chests and roll-top desks look delicate, but Geller insists his creations are sturdy. "They're made for kids so you can handle them."

He uses poplar and red oak because they are soft enough to shape on his lathe. "I'll make one out of poplar first. Then if it looks good I'll make one out of red wood."

Geller says a few of the furnishings were built based on photos in Sears catalogs. All cabinet doors and drawers open and close like the real thing. "I try to get it to a reasonable facsimile of the original."

About the only things Geller doesn't make are the microscopic metal hinges and handles.

Geller, who was raised in northeast New Jersey and has lived here 2½ years, says this area needs a few good hobby shops. A 14-millimeter thread chuck, for instance, is impossible to find in these parts.

"A lot of the tools I have I bought in a train shop in New York City," he said. "I'd like to see a good hobby shop because I think the demand would be here."

GED Grad Says Going Back To Class Is 'Good For Mind, Body and Soul'

BY SUSAN USHER

Graduates of Brunswick Community College's literacy program are its best recruiting tool, and sisters Euzena Coleman and Betty Ferguson of Shallotte are a good example of why that's true.

Friday night they will walk across the stage of the new Odell Williamson Auditorium to receive their GED-General Education Development or high school equivalency certificates. They are among 121 students to complete the GED since graduation a year ago.

The hard-earned certificates will be hung proudly in their homes, evidence of the effort the two women have made to continue their education.

"It's exciting. It's something I'm proud of, something no one can ever take away. I'll always cherish it," said Coleman.

Both credit supportive classmates, family and BCC staff in part for their success. Going back to school has boosted their self-esteem and self-confidence in ways neither had imagined, opening new doors, creating a sense of self-determination.

Betty Ferguson had been promoted to sixth grade when she decided not to return to school, though her family begged her to go and would have sent her on to college.

"I guess I hated to leave my mom," she recalled. "I can remember making the remark to her 'I would rather stay home with you and dig ditches the rest of my life than go to school.'"

Euzena Coleman was about to enter seventh grade when she dropped out of school to marry. She had always wanted to return to school for her GED, "but it seemed like I could never get the opportunity."

Each did eventually return to school. After her husband, who had finished eighth grade, and son, a high school dropout, both enrolled in a GED class that met at West Brunswick High School, Betty Ferguson did too. That was in 1987.

"They got their GEDs fast," she said. "It was a little discouraging because it was harder for me, but I knew I needed more education."

Ferguson, 56, went to class two nights a week, after tending her two grandchildren during the day. If classes had met daily, she said, she wouldn't have made it.

It was still tough keeping her eye on the mark, staying motivated. "At different times I would stop for a while, but I always went back. I hung in there. It helped that my teachers would say encouraging things."

"At first when I was holding down a job and trying to get to class at 6 p.m. they would start handing out those

worksheets and I would just start crying," she recalled. "I was so tired and it seemed so hard. But I stuck with it. I have achieved this one thing in my life."

Last November Coleman, who will be 63 come Sept. 23, plunged into the same GED class Ferguson was enrolled in at Shallotte Presbyterian Church, partly to encourage her sister to finish, partly to fulfill her own dream.

Some years earlier she had obtained her beautician's and practical nursing licenses through classes at Cape Fear Community Community. Now she was back in school again. Once started, she was hard to stop. She only missed two nights of class and worked diligently.

"I think you study more when you're going at night because you realize in those three hours you have to get it," she reflected.

With a lot of support from her husband, Coleman whipped through the classes, managing to keep them a secret from her daughter until the end, when she arranged for instructor Rich Dixon to send a copy of her GED test results to her daughter.

Ferguson had worried that as an older student, she might not be accepted by younger college students, but found them very warm and welcoming. "They were so nice and when I missed they always wanted to know why I wasn't there."

Success breeds success. Because of her own experiences, Coleman has encouraged another friend to enroll in a GED class, she said, and that friend is talking to someone else.

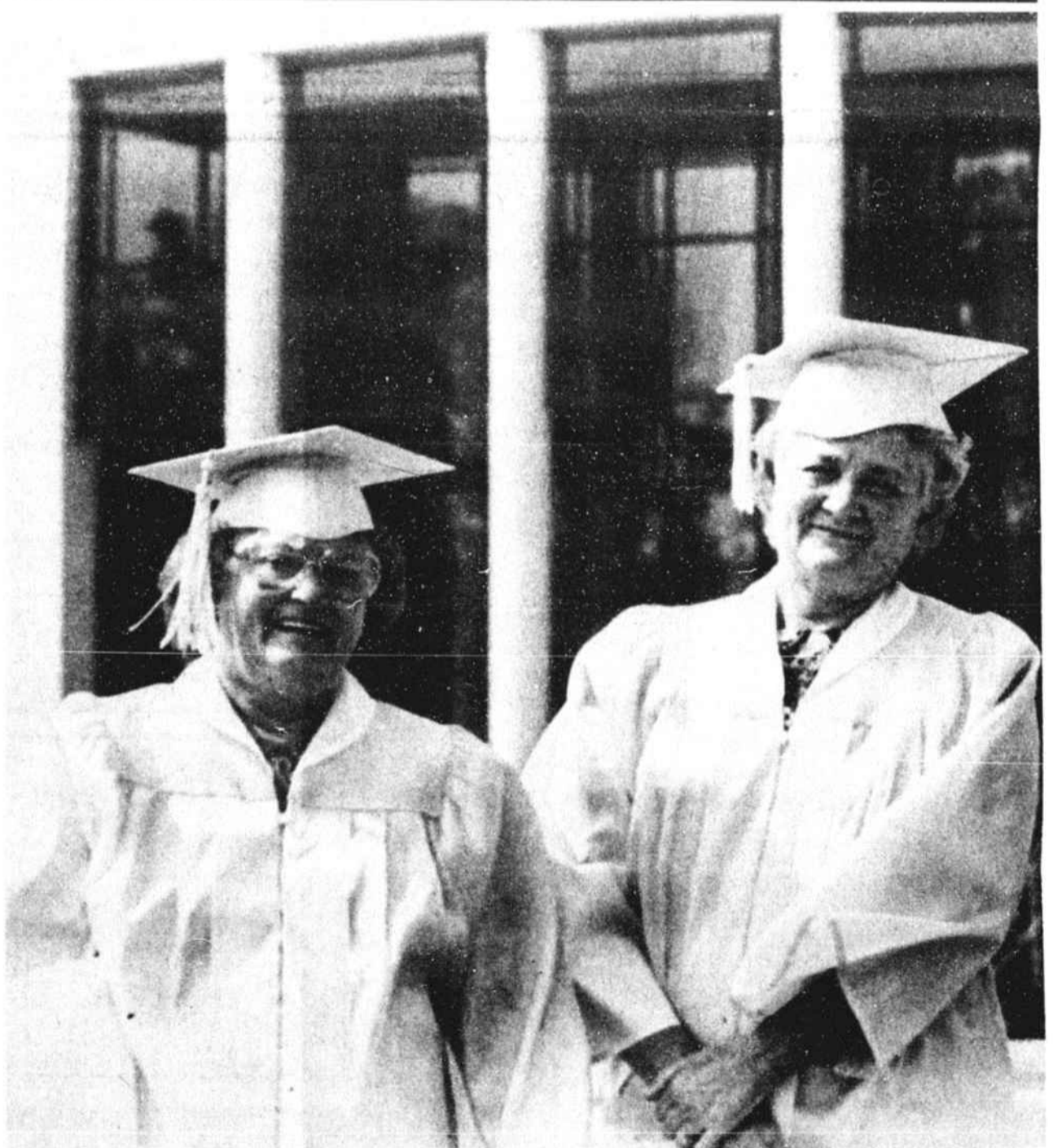
Both Ferguson and Coleman want to continue taking more courses, college-level from now on, they say, whenever they can work around responsibilities that include keeping grandchildren.

Ferguson's daughter, Sandy Duran, is also in school, working on a bachelor's degree in music at the University of North Carolina at Wilmington.

Going back to school, says Ferguson, "has made a brand new world for me. Before I always relied on my husband to do everything because he had the know-how. Now I've started doing things I have never done before."

Coleman is also quick to praise the GED program: "What's so wonderful is there's no age limit. It doesn't matter if you're 70 or 80, you can go back and get it and it's free. These days you need all the education you can get."

"My advice to people our age is this: Get out of your chair and get back in school. It's good for your body, mind and soul. It's give you a purpose for living."



STAFF PHOTO BY SUSAN USHER

SISTERS Euzena Coleman (left) and Betty Ferguson always regretted dropping out of school years ago and finally did something about it. As two of the 121 graduates of Brunswick Community College's General Education Development program this past year, they will participate in commencement 7:30 p.m. Friday at the Odell Williamson Auditorium along with curriculum program graduates.

BINGO
Thursday Nights • Doors Open 6:15 pm
Calabash VFW Post 7288
Carter Rd., Trader's Village, Calabash, 579-3577
OPEN TO THE PUBLIC
Games begin at 7:30 PM
Minimum "Buy In" \$5.00
Minimum Pay Out \$650.00 Maximum \$725
Snacks Available • No Children under 12
NEW SMOKE-FREE AIR SYSTEM

COASTAL PEDIATRICS
James V. Mulholland M.D.
•Fellow of American Academy of Pediatrics
•The Only Board Certified Pediatrician in Brunswick County
Shallotte Professional Plaza
4428 Main Street • Shallotte
754-KIDS(5437)

TJ's AUTO ELECTRIC
ALTERNATORS STARTERS
VOLTAGE REGULATORS GENERATORS
REPAIR—REBUILT—EXCHANGED
AUTOMOTIVE WIRING
754-7656
Royal Oak Road & Hwy. 17 N., Shallotte