

# **Basic Personal Shelter**

A Housing Alternative

The Evolution of Housing in a Modern World

by

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## **Table of Contents**

Foreword – from Jeff

Foreword - from Jason

Chapter 1 - Defining the Terms

Chapter 2 - Basic Personal Shelter as a Housing Alternative, or

An Evolution/Revolution in Housing

Chapter 3 - The Development and Evolution of the BPS

Chapter 4 - The BPS Jeff Built and What He Learned

Chapter 5 - Go Forth! The Possibilities of the BPS are in Your

Hands

Final Thoughts from Jason

## **Foreword from Jeff**

This is the story of one person's attempt to fill a need with a product that did not previously exist. It is also the story of the design of a house to match the needs of a modern single person.

The book is written in the first person, as in "I did" and "my thoughts" and "my idea". We tried writing it otherwise, and it did not sound right. It is about one person's ideas – mine, and what I have done with them. However, the book has truly been a collaboration. Without Jason's efforts, it would not have been written. I tried multiple times to write it on my own. I could not get past the first several pages. I could not see it as a complete story. Jason could. I think his attorney skills made this possible. He can see how to present a case to the jury -- how to make sense of a collection of scattered thoughts. Thus, we are both shown as the authors.

## **Foreword from Jason**

If it can be believed, the origins of this work come out of a series of discussions between myself (Jason Bridges) and Jeff Abrams about brocollini, rapini, and various other strange-sounding vegetables. Jeff is a very brilliant architect, and he is also a loyal shopper at the Publix Supermarket where I work part-time in the produce department. I am currently in law school at the University of South Carolina, where Jeff is also employed as an architect. I would see Jeff shopping in the store every Saturday night, and we often fell into discussions about all manner of subjects. One night, Jeff mentioned he built a very unique, very small, house (240 square feet) located right in our hometown of Columbia, South Carolina.

Several conversations about the house followed, and I soon realized that the house meant much more to Jeff than simply a well-designed small structure.

The house represented a truly alternative approach to housing in our society. Jeff labeled this approach to housing Basic Personal Shelter (BPS), and it has great potential to shift the way we think of housing. Basic Personal Shelter is Jeff's life work and his great contribution to the world of architecture. All the ideas, drawings, and the small house itself are Jeff's work. He has been tirelessly pursuing and developing his work on Basic Personal Shelter since 1978 (or earlier).

My role in all of this is simply to help Jeff disseminate and distill his ideology of Basic Personal Shelter. Jeff believes that BPS has the potential to transform the way our society thinks about housing and it is my great privilege to assist him with this goal. This book contains a description of what Basic Personal Shelter is and how it can transform society. It also contains the floor plans, drawings and photos of the small house that Jeff built in 1989.

## Chapter 1

### Defining the Terms

**Basic Personal Shelter** is the term I have given to a very small house which accommodates the basic needs of a person living alone.

**BPS** is the abbreviation for Basic Personal Shelter. It is easier to say and write than Basic Personal Shelter.

**Housing** broadly refers to the category of building type that encompasses all those buildings that people live in. It ranges from free standing houses to high rise apartment buildings, and everything in between such as tents, cabins, huts, duplexes, triplexes, attached row houses, townhouses, houseboats, tree houses, mobile homes, travel trailers, sleeping compartments in long haul trucks, living

quarters on ships, caves, tree-covered spots on the beach and in the forest and the jungle, igloos, teepees, covered wagons, and on, and on, and on. Housing is the category of buildings that encompasses what we live in.

**A housing alternative** means a type of housing not generally thought of when one thinks of housing options.

**12 x 20, 12 x 12, 10 x 10, 8 x 8** refers to the floor plan size, in feet, of a building, specifically a BPS as referred to in this book. 12 x 20 means a building that measures 12 feet wide by 20 feet long. That is about the size of a one-car garage. 12 x 12 would be a BPS that measures 12 feet wide by 12 feet long. You can take a 1 foot ruler, or a yard stick, and measure a room in your house to see what this size really is. Remember, it is the dimensions on the floor.

**Evolution of housing** means how housing has changed to respond to the needs of the time.

**A Modern World** refers to TODAY. What is Modern for us is what is current TODAY – specifically what in the stream of progress exists Today from society having built upon the efforts of people who came before. What exists today in our modern world that I would think of as significant as relates to housing includes things such as electronic communications that allow the average person

to easily have voice and picture contact with anyone, anywhere in the world. Also, small efficient machines that control temperature inside of buildings, and small appliances for the storage and preparation of food. I also think of social progress as defining Modern and Today - such as personal independence that comes from the confidence one gets from education and knowledge more easily available today, and physical fitness which results from today's healthy lifestyle movement that includes proper nutrition and physical activity, and also the mental peace of mind that comes from reading about the forces of life and how to deal with them. I believe the goal is to embrace all the good that is available to you Today. It is a rich world, full from what has come before and what is here now. A Modern person takes advantage of it all.

End Chapter 1



## **Chapter 2**

### **Basic Personal Shelter as a Housing Alternative**

**or**

### **An Evolution/Revolution in Housing**

Food, clothing, shelter, medical care – the basic human needs. One reason we need shelter is because everyone eventually falls asleep and would like a safe place to do so. The houses we live in today, except for bathrooms and kitchens, are essentially the same as the houses of 1000 years ago. While everything else has evolved and changed, I don't see houses keeping up with trends in society. Typical houses are bulky and expensive. I see the modern person ready for a house that is an extension of their well-tuned self. Visit a college campus today and you will see a lot of very physically fit young people confidently walking

around with their cell phones connecting them to the world. This was not the person you saw on campus 30 years ago. I see their housing needs being filled by a small, minimum-size, one-person house which I call a Basic Personal Shelter – a BPS.

In a BPS, a modern person can eat, sleep, bathe, store and prepare food, relax, keep a few possessions, and visit with a friend. This modern shelter provides housing for a single person, and in a very cost-efficient manner. It does not deprive you of any comforts of a “standard” house, except for space. But the space in a BPS is “enough”. The concept of “enough” is one that appeals to many people today. Being satisfied with “enough”, and not needing “more”, can allow you a sense of peace and satisfaction. What more can you ask?

When I first started working on the concept of single person houses, there were no cell phones or internet. When you were alone in your small house, you were alone, except for bringing someone in on your landline telephone. I did not see this as a problem because I am a very independent person. Today, with the internet and large flat panel video screens, another person can be in the room with you in all reality except the flesh. To me, this capability makes the BPS livable for a broader range of people. This connection distinguishes “living alone”

today from living alone in the past. You are not really “alone” when you can easily talk with and see another person. You can even have dinner with someone who is not physically with you. True, this is not the same as what we have traditionally thought of as “having dinner” with someone. But again, this is the Modern World. Things have Evolved. Don’t think of being alone as limiting, think of modern technology as EXPANDING – just think, you can now have dinner with Anyone, who lives Anywhere, not just someone who is physically there with you. You are alone when you want to be, and not alone when you don’t want to be. A Modern person looks at reality in a Modern way. One-person houses are Modern.

I often use the expandable backpack analogy when trying to describe the concept of the BPS – a minimum-size, one-person house. I see the students at the University where I work carrying backpacks. It is interesting to see the pile of backpacks on the floor in a lecture hall at the lower level where everyone enters. I guess they are too big for everyone to carry them up the steps and fit them in at the lecture hall seat. These backpacks are not especially big, but when I see them on the students backs, I do often observe cords coming out of them for headphones, jackets strapped to the back, water bottles tucked in the side, umbrellas strapped to them, and they are obviously packed full with books,

laptop, and probably snacks and the other items one might need on a day-long excursion around campus. I often think that at night, when classes are over, and the chores of the day are done, and night has fallen, that they would be perfectly happy if they could just sit down on the ground and pull a cord, and out would pop a tent that would surround them, and they could lay down and go to sleep. That would be the BPS at its most basic, up-sized from the backpack, as opposed to down-sized from a standard house.

The BPS has the potential to provide modern housing for vast numbers of single people. Think of modern housing as meaning a house with adequate sanitation facilities, adequate food storage and preparation facilities, adequate environmental controls, and adequate space to conduct your private life. In the United States, housing has traditionally focused on accommodating a single family in a house or apartment. Our culture highly values privacy and personal space. However, these notions of privacy and personal space are manifested in housing that is almost always designed for multiple individuals. There are very few housing options that are designed to accommodate the single-person unit. Apartment buildings, duplexes and such do offer one-person units, but these buildings don't offer the privacy of a free-standing house. The BPS is based on the principle that a very small house can be highly livable if it is a free-standing house,

and not a unit that has other units below it, above it, or on the other side of the wall. The inherent privacy afforded by a “house”, with no one on the other side of a wall, ceiling, or floor, makes a very small house not seem so small. The open air space surrounding the house expands the livable area and also offers a privacy buffer. This does make a difference. A very small house is truly not the same living experience as a very small apartment.

The lack of affordable housing for single people is a problem today. There is a considerable demographic of people who wish to live as a single-person unit. These are people of all ages and all walks of life, who find themselves living alone for one reason or another. I know many people who live alone. I am sure everyone does. Basic Personal Shelter (BPS) is housing for this growing demographic. And while people still desire to be an educated and productive part of society, work opportunities are changing, so affording to live alone in a house is becoming more difficult. The BPS is intended to be an affordable home option for the modern single person. I can imagine the day when even those who can afford more will make the BPS their housing of choice. Simplicity and affordability can be highly desirable qualities.

End Chapter Two

## Chapter 3

### The Development and Evolution of the BPS

A BPS is a minimum size, one-person house. I have always been interested in small houses. I don't know why. It's like the guy who played baseball since he was 4. You just find yourself doing something, and you enjoy doing it, and you keep doing it, and you get more comfortable doing it, and if you are lucky, you get good at it. While I was an architecture student at Clemson, I doodled small off-campus dorm-like houses. I figured students already used to living in one-half of a 12 x 15 room could live in seeming luxury in an off-campus small house with a bathroom to be shared by only 3 students in lieu of the gang toilets of the dorm. I never built one of these fantasy off-campus dorm houses, but I did do my senior thesis on off-campus student housing. Seems that I have been destined to design houses for single people my whole life. Being single myself, maybe that's appropriate.

By the way, there is something about small houses more than they are small. They tend to support the idea of simple living. One of the rewards for living in a small house is experiencing the beauty of simple living. But I really don't want to let the "simple living" movement overshadow the most obvious benefit of very small houses – lower costs. Very small houses offer a lot of people who might not otherwise be so fortunate, the opportunity to have their own house.

While I was thinking a lot about very small houses, they had yet to manifest themselves to me as Basic Personal Shelter.

I moved to California from South Carolina after graduation from Architecture school. I had family there and I have always been drawn to Southern California residential architecture. At that point, I was more focused on residential architecture in general, and not on very small houses, or single-person houses. I was now away from dorms, and back to the normal world of regular houses with regular families, and roommates sharing houses. After a couple of years I found my way to San Francisco. Here was a city of large houses and large flats routinely shared by unrelated single people just so they could afford a place to live. After about 5 years in SF, many living situations, and many, many

roommates later, I finally said to myself “I would rather live alone in a one-room house than in a mansion with roommates”. I think that marked the beginning (the birth) of the BPS!

The problem with roommates was *no privacy*. I also discovered I was not the kind of person who paired up well with someone. So I did not have a mate to share a place with. I was single, and independent. Most places for rent in San Francisco were too expensive to afford by myself. So I was resigned to roommates. They usually lasted about 3 months, until I got tired of them (familiarity breeds contempt) or they got tired of me. That’s when I started seriously thinking about how small a place I could live in. I was thinking maybe I could **BUILD** a place of my own, on a very limited income, and afford it without a roommate.

I started with the criteria that I needed an 8 ft x 8 ft clear floor space for free movement. I could stand up in a space that size and swing my arms. That was the minimum-size space I was willing to live in. The kitchen and bathroom could not encroach on this space. This led to my first Basic Personal Shelter designs. I named these houses “Hut Houses”. They are my earliest conceptualization of a BPS. They embodied the core idea of minimum space for



personal living. They are shown here in the drawing dated October 25, 1978, as the 12 ft x 12 ft Hut House, and the 10 ft x 10 ft and 8 ft x 8 ft. I have yet to build any of them, except in scale model form. I have since worked heavily on the 12 x 12. Intuitively, I have always preferred that size the most and I like the “hut” shape. **(Here show the best version of the 12 x 12 and expound upon it.)**

Back to me in San Francisco and wanting a one-room house. Where would I put my 12 x 12 house? Vacant land in San Francisco is expensive and rare. But the City is also very creative. I decided I would try to find someone who would let me build it on the roof of their flat-roofed garage. It sounded plausible to me. Why not? I placed an ad in a neighborhood newspaper looking for someone who had such a garage and was interested in my idea. Not too surprising to me, I did get a reply. But just at that time, some family issues came up and I needed to return to South Carolina. Unfortunately, I was unable to pursue my hut-house-on-garage-roof dream in San Francisco. I was upset about this, since I had struggled to get this far. I had come up with a house I really liked, and a way to make it a reality. It was definitely a solution (best I could tell) that had not been done before and held much promise for me, and maybe would be found interesting by others. Remember, I am an architect, and solving a problem in a unique way is very exciting.

I did return home to South Carolina. I was disappointed that I had to leave San Francisco, but there are driving forces in life bigger than personal desire. I settled into a regular working life as an architect. The very small house concept kept surfacing in my head. The momentum I had built up in SF fortunately would not die. I found myself scouring my home city – Columbia, South Carolina – for small, affordable vacant lots. Like pre-destined, devine magic, I did find one. It was 30 ft x 50 ft, located a half block from the University of South Carolina, in a neighborhood that was undergoing revitalization, with several smallish houses close by. There I could place a very small house that might not look too out-of-place, and it would also appeal to students as a rental, in case I ever wanted to rent it. Unlike my SF garage-top fantasy, I realized I would need to meet the building code requirements to build on a lot in Columbia. I might have gotten away with a "guest room gazebo on top of a garage" in SF, but it would need to be a legitimate code-compliant house on its own lot in SC. This led to the 12 ft x 20 ft BPS that I eventually did build on the lot I found close to USC. We will discuss it in more detail in Chapter 4, how I did meet the building code, and did use my knowledge of architecture to make my BPS a livable house. Of course, holding true to my initial thoughts, I still wonder today if the 12 x 20 is a really a Basic Personal Shelter or a just a very small house. The BPS was borne of the desire for

a minimum-size house. The 12 x 20 was minimum to meet code, but more than minimum for living, as I see it. In SF I was trying to build 144 sq ft. My house in Columbia is 240 sq ft. I have had it now for 23 years. While I love it, and I am sure it succeeds as a livable very small house, I have frequent thoughts that the original 12 x 12 Hut House captures more of the essence of the Basic Personal Shelter concept that I started with. The 12 x 20 may turn out to be the size that works best for most people, but I think the 12 x 12 may be closer to my goal. I think the next step for me after we complete this book is to finally build a 12 x 12 and find out.

End Chapter Three

## Chapter 4

### The BPS Jeff Built and What He Learned

Finally, after years of thinking, and imagining, and wondering, and supposing, and doodling, and drawing carefully, and evaluating, and talking about, and looking for a place to put it, and trying to figure out how to pay for it— in 1988 (10 years after I did my first drawing with Basic Person Shelter labeled on it) I started building my first full-size, up-to-code BPS. I had built  $\frac{1}{4}$ " = 1' – 0" models before of the 12 x 12 hut house. There was no risk in doing that -- only excitement and satisfaction in seeing my ideas in hard 3 dimensions. But a full-size BPS built to be lived in was a big risk. It would not be inexpensive to build. I was still a low-paid architect, and money did not come easily. Would a very small house actually be desirable to anyone but me??

Before I talk about my BPS (I might as well call it my house, because it is my house, it serves the same purpose as a house, in fact it is really large enough for one person to live in almost the same as he would in a traditional house, which is why I struggle at times to decide if it is too big to be a BPS), before I talk about the BPS I built, we need to talk about a really critical piece of this puzzle. You need to have a lot to put this on if you are going to build it and live in it in a fixed location, which was my intention. It is not on wheels. It is not mobile. Like a “real” house, it needs a place to sit. The BPS I started to build in San Francisco was 12 ft x 12 ft. My plan was to find a flat roof garage where I could place it. It would be the equivalent of a penthouse guest room -- a bedroom and bath with a small convenience kitchen. It was not intended to be a house in the traditional sense. Though I had not confirmed this, I was thinking it would be permissible with the City of SF building department. When I returned to South Carolina, I now had to face the reality of complying with all building code requirements for a regular house, since I would be placing this as a free-standing dwelling on a deeded lot of record. There is vacant land in Columbia, and there are few flat roof garages. There also was not the urban attitude at the time that would have

considered my garage-roof scheme appropriate. That said, I did, however, vow to build the smallest house that the building code would let me.

I began looking near the University, where I felt sure I would find a student happily willing to live in a BPS if it turned out to be too small for me. I doubted it would, especially since I had lived in it in my mind for years, and knew it well, but it was going to be a sizeable investment, and I was hedging my bets so I did not build a white-elephant.

I found an empty lot in a block adjacent to the University. It was in an old area that had been populated with mostly small shotgun type houses long ago. The residents had mostly moved and most of the houses had been torn down. The lot I found was 30 ft x 50 ft. It was the perfect scale for what I wanted to build, and the lots adjacent to it were also small, with relatively small houses on them, so mine would not really look out of place. There were no deed restrictions with home size limits (minimum or maximum) that would prevent me from building my house, only the minimum space requirements of the building code. I contacted the owner and they agreed to sell it. They probably thought no one would want a lot so small. With the required

zoning set backs, it would be hard to build a usual house on it. I got it for a good price, which was a lucky break for me.

I was really fortunate to find a lot to build my BPS on. I do see this as a problem for future BPSes. Where to build them? Many neighborhoods have minimum-size house restrictions that are more restrictive than the building code. I do think that society is changing, however, and houses 240 sq. ft., and possibly smaller, are not as much a shock today. Traditional city lots could be subdivided, possibly, and I hear of cities allowing small houses to be built in the back yards of existing houses. I bought my lot around 1980, and started building my house in 1988. I believe society is heading in the right direction for acceptance of much smaller houses. I am optimistic. Let's not get discouraged. I think the BPS makes too much sense not to pursue it.

I also note that I have heard much lately about the vast open areas in major US cities, such as Detroit. As I understand it, houses have been left abandoned by those leaving cities for work and safer neighborhoods, and whole neighborhoods have deteriorated to the point that the houses have been torn down and neighborhoods turned into grass lots. This situation, while terrible right now, offers huge

opportunities. Demographics have changed, family structure has changed, housing demands have changed, affordability has changed. It is highly possible that BPSes will become part of the urban fabric – very small houses on very small lots, offering single people of all ages a place of their own in the heart of a city. Sounds good to me!

After finding and buying the lot, my next challenges were going to be finalizing the design of the house, figuring out how to pay for it, and getting it built.

I did not have much trouble finalizing the design. It seemed to fall into place. The floor plan was the key. I wanted it to be no more than 12 ft wide so it could be pre-fabbed in a factory and trucked to the site. Remember this first unit was the prototype. I hoped many would follow. The BPS has always been intended to be mass-produced. It is to be a lowest common denominator home shelter, easily available to large numbers of people. This led me to believe it would be best built in an efficient factory, fully-assembled, and taken to the site by a vehicle, where it would be hooked up to utility connections (water, sewer, electricity), and lived in. It would be small enough that you could have it moved again in the future if you wanted to move, though I can imagine when there are enough of these out



there, it would be easier to trade or sell yours and buy another already set up in your new location. Though movable, it would feel like a permanent home, not a mobile home on wheels. Some small houses are made as houses on wheels so that they do not have to comply with building codes. What good are they? Some communities, towns, and cities have restrictions against living in a home on wheels. Like the Model T Ford, we would finally have an essential element of life available to the greater population. (But yes, unlike the Ford, no wheels.)

So it would be 12 feet wide max. We can haul wider, but not easily. Eight feet wide would be better for hauling, but this seemed too narrow to me at the time. Really just out of proportion. That would make it long and narrow to get the square footage I needed to satisfy the building code minimum area. Not a comfortable proportion to me. I am ok with 8 ft wide for a smaller BPS, which may prove more popular someday. Making it 12 ft wide worked perfectly with the arrangement I ended up with – kitchen back to back with the bathroom. The design I built seemed automatic. It fit, it worked, it made sense. I drew it, but it came from devine inspiration, if you choose to believe in that.

There were building code minimum rooms and area requirements to comply with. A house needed to have one room of 150 sq ft minimum, plus a bathroom and a kitchen. The intent of the code is to protect the housing stock of a community. Without minimums, houses without adequate sanitary and cooking facilities could be built, as they probably are today in places without codes. Also, it could have so little space, it would be generally uninhabitable by other than a few. I suspect there are apartments in divided up old houses and old apartment buildings that have escaped the city inspectors that are lived in today that are miniscule and inadequate, but continue to exist due to high demand for affordable sleeping space, especially in big cities. I made the one room of 150 sq ft the kitchen, so I did not have to have 3 rooms. See drawing of areas I used to get city approval. There are also code requirements for minimum ceiling heights, windows, ventilation, and other things which make a house livable, and are generally common sense and not unduly limiting to the BPS movement. *(Me, check code I designed under and current code and expand on this. Show drawing I used to get plan approval.)*

I also wanted the house to relate to the lot I was putting it on, and it needed to meet city zoning requirements. I did not want to need to seek a zoning variance, because I believed my house was so unusual in its size, that the city would deny a zoning variance to keep such a small house from being built, even though the house itself met the building code. I worried that neighbors would object to the small size and protest at the zoning variance hearing. It is an unfortunate misconception of many homeowners, developers, land planners, city officials, that small houses destroy the property values of neighborhoods. This is absolutely not true, and can be demonstrated in cities such as Key West, Beverly Hills, and San Francisco. If a community is highly desirable to live in, for reasons such as location, natural beauty, views, unique setting such as ocean frontage, and the residents take good care of their houses, then small houses exist side by side with large houses and have no negative affect on property values.

I was again “lucky” that my design of 12 ft x 20 ft fit on the lot perfectly, allowing me to meet the zoning setback requirements of 5 ft minimum side yards, 10 ft minimum rear yard, front yard setback based on yards of existing houses on the block, and still have room to

park the 1 required vehicle on my property. A zoning variance would not be necessary. Lucky or Devine? You decide. I will say that after over 40 years of continuing to pursue this one idea, there is something inside me that keeps me doing it, something bigger than me. I believe I am the medium that brings this message for others to hear.

The relationship of the house to the lot also fell into place. The driveway came off the street, a typical driveway. I could park my vehicle in front of my house, again typical and convenient. I had room left over for a sidewalk and steps up to the porch and the front door. There was room on the side for a narrow walk to the back yard, which was small, but still a back yard, which I could fence in, like a typical back yard, and keep a dog, if I should want to, or cook on an outdoor grill, or work in the garden – things that make a house more desirable than an apartment. It would be a very small house (in this case, a BPS) but a house none the less. And as a huge bonus, my lot happened to be in the last row of houses down a hill that had an unobstructed view of the city in the near distance. Up the hill behind me, people were paying vast sums for lots and building 3 storey

houses so they could see over their neighbors and have a room on the top floor which had a similar view to mine. How ironic.

All this said, I am an architect, and I had designed “regular” houses before – those for families, with several bedrooms and bathrooms, and normal areas for family life. So I had a strong concept of what made for a good house. One of these principles was sequence of space -- logic in the flow of people through the house and unfolding of the house as you walk through it. The floor plan has always been key in my estimation. I used these same principles in the design of my house, my BPS.

One enters on a front porch. It is covered by the 3 foot roof overhang. This gives you protection while you stand at the front door to unlock it or while someone is waiting outside for you to answer their knock. This 3 foot overhang is enough to protect you from the rain, but not enough for you to think you could enclose it and make the house larger. We always want to remember the concept of “enough”. The house is large enough. Resist temptations to want more. Don’t make it easy to make it larger.

Once inside, the “foyer” is also the kitchen and it contains “the closet”. You do not enter directly into the main room of the house. You transition from entry porch to foyer, and then into the main room. You cannot see the full house from the entry. This house is small, but it still has the sequence of space that makes a house a quality experience.

Then into the main room, where you now see the back yard, which is accessible from the main room. You do not yet see the bathroom, and the kitchen is no longer visible now that you are in the main room. You are inside the house now. You are no longer in the foyer. The front door, which brought you into the house, is not directly off the main room. You will have to go back into the foyer to exit out the front door. This adds to privacy. With the front door open, a person outside cannot see past the foyer.

Past the main room there is still the bathroom and the back yard. As we said, the bathroom cannot be seen from the main room. It is “around the corner”. The back yard is visible from the main room and easy to get to through a sliding glass door onto a small deck and down into the yard. There is no furniture on the deck. It is just big enough to stand on. The steps down into the yard are the “furniture”.

You can sit on them. This house is very small, but “satisfying”.  
While the BPS is first a basic shelter, it is also a residence for a human being. It does not hurt to respect the emotional and aesthetic needs that distinguish a well-designed house.

One more item of importance for the design of the interior is the ceiling height. The building code minimum required ceiling height was x feet x inches high. I was trained as an architect to understand that architecture is the art of defined space. The ceiling height was critical to defining the space and making it comfortable. The main room ended up with a 9 foot high ceiling. The room feels comfortable, not small. What really distinguishes this 240 sq ft house from a 2,400 sq ft house is the number of rooms. What space my house does have, does not feel like a “doll house”. It is normal feeling space, just less of it.

Next, building it. First money, then construction. How to pay for it? I had to pay cash for the construction. I tried unsuccessfully to get a bank to make a loan. They were not willing to risk their money on a 240 sq. ft. house. So I saved for a long time until I had enough to build it. It slowed the process down, but at least I did not have a mortgage to pay after it was built. Not such a bad thing after all.

For the construction, I got a contractor who was doing some work on a project for the office I was working in to give me a price for the shell – foundation, walls with exterior siding only, windows, doors, and roof. He built the shell, then I contracted out the remaining pieces to finish it – electrical, plumbing, heat/air, insulation, gypsum board walls and ceiling, flooring, painting. It was a slow process that taught me I did not like being a contractor. It just reinforced my belief that the BPS process would work best if the units are built in a factory, and delivered to the purchaser at his lot ready to be set in place, hooked up, and lived in. Prefab construction has been a fantasy, and reality, for many architects and builders for eons. I think the BPS is one building type that could be successful for this process.

After about 2 years of construction, slow because I was finishing it as money became available, and I was working full time in addition to coordinating contractors for my house, the city decided I was complete and closed out my building permit. I finished up the concrete drive, the concrete walks, adding dirt to get the proper slope away from the house, and finally the landscaping.

Construction ended in the early 1990s. I have spent the last 20 years maintaining my BPS. I truly love it. It is all I dreamed of and



more. It is a really cool little house. Many people have seen it and seem to like it too. Several years ago, in an effort to get the word out, I set up a website – [VerySmallHouse.com](http://VerySmallHouse.com) – which shows my BPS. The site has received thousands of hits and I have received a lot of email comments and questions from all over the world. The most common question is “How can I get one and how much does it cost?”. Unfortunately, my reply has been they are not available yet, though you could have a local builder construct one for you. I also tell them how it is my hope that eventually they will be available in mass production at no more than the cost of an average new car.

I have concluded that if I am ever to get past the current idea-and-prototype phase, I need to make an impression on more people. Thus, I have always seen a book as being a probable necessity. I think now is the right time for this book, because I believe society now recognizes the need and is ready to consider solutions for mass housing. **Get ready, here comes the BPS!**

End Chapter Four

## CHAPTER 5

### GO FORTH!

#### THE POSSIBILITIES OF THE BPS ARE IN YOUR HANDS

The preceding four chapters of this book have told you about an alternative to housing as we know it today – the single person house. I don't think we have ever thought of mass housing needs being met by single person houses. But why can't we? Every person has basic home needs. Couples, families, friends can have their BPS next to each other so they can function as a social group. Except at the very young level, when infants and young children need a parent figure close at hand, I believe most healthy people would appreciate having a private space where they can live their personal life. They can share their private space when they want to, but the beauty of independence will be available to them all.

I once designed a house for a couple and their 3 children. It was approximately 3000 sq ft. I went to visit them several years after it was

completed, and the wife showed me how she had enclosed a small deck off of the bedroom she shared with her husband. It was probably around 80 sq. ft. She told me she had no place of her own in the house and she really wanted some privacy. I thought about my 240 sq ft house. They could have built 5 houses at 240 sq ft each = 1200 sq ft total, and each one would have had complete privacy when they wanted it. Of course, I know this is a semi-radical idea. But I do think eventually it will not seem so radical. Once single people adopt the BPS as a housing option, I think families will start thinking about them too.

Something to keep in mind – when we talk about 240 sq ft per person, we are talking about housing by US standards. I am sure that in some countries, 240 sq ft would comfortably provide shelter for far more than one person. I can imagine at the extreme, 7 people at a time could sleep on the floor in 3 shifts a day, so 21 people might call the 12 x 20 BPS home.

I have been working on BPSes for 40+ years now. My hope is that this book will present this concept in such a way that other people will start working on them. There is so much to do, so much to try. There are all sorts of material options, and size options, and accessory options, and shape/design options, and building/manufacturing/assembly options, and

financing/ownership options, and land placement options. My hope is that we have successfully presented an idea, a concept – one with merit that will motivate the creative and ambitious of you out there to see the positive possibilities and put your own time and effort into taking this farther into reality.

I can imagine material experts saying “these would be great made from \_\_\_\_\_”. And city planners saying “these would be great located \_\_\_\_\_”. And builders saying “I can easily see these being assembled in factories located up to \_\_\_\_\_ miles from where we will take them to their new owner”. And I can see single people of all ages saying “I can’t wait to buy a BPS so I can finally have a place of my own”.

If this idea takes hold, there is no saying what they will look like 10 or 25 or 50 or 100 years from now. Compare an original Model T Ford of the 1920s to an automobile of 2013. Compare a telephone of 1930 to a telephone of 2013. Housing has not yet evolved as have other tools of our lives. I think it can. I think with the advent of easy communication, people no longer feel alone when they are alone. It will take a major shift in the way we think of housing for it to evolve into something that responds to life today. Except for indoor plumbing and kitchens, and modern heat/air

conditioning, houses of today are much the same as houses of 400 years ago. I think many people are not, though, and I think they are ready for a change. Think I-phone, think BPS. Think arthroscopic surgery, think BPS. Think flat screen TV, think BPS. Think digital photos, think BPS. Think anything that has come about in recent years to make life better in a modern way, and then think BPS. I have followed this idea for a long time. I need help now. I hope Jason and I have said what we have said well-enough for that help to come, not for my sake, but for the benefit of everyone. I will do what I can to help you. Just let me know. I promise to give my time and energy. I can be reached at [Jeff@VerySmallHouse.com](mailto:Jeff@VerySmallHouse.com). Thanks, Jeff. June 19, 2013.

End Chapter Five

## **Final Thoughts from Jason**

(Awaiting draft from Jason)