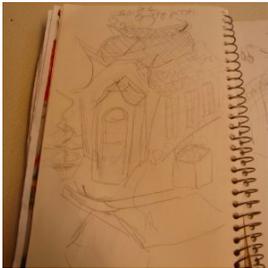


"This is Marilyn's Brain on Gingerbread: a non-linear, wobbly GBH journey from inception to delivery."

T'was the month before Christmas and all through the facility, not a single *Toys for Tots* poster was stirring—which was BAD! because *Toys for Tots* needed *Bikes for Tykes* and sequestration had cut the funding for this great tradition. This meant a TFT GBH ASAP.

Day ONE

CONCEPT



I wanted GBH's primary focus to be the "toy" aspect of *Toys for Tots*. My first sketch shows a basic house with a bag of toys on the roof.

But ya know...*something* about this sketch reminded of *something...else*? And it was "**How The Grinch Stole Christmas**"



me

And just like that, I had my theme which dictated the following elements:

1. GBH
2. The Grinch, which in turn dictated the...
3. Color scheme: " **Grinch Green** and **Red**"
4. Big bag of toys
5. Sleigh
6. Max the Dog
7. Banner

HOUSE DESIGN

To be brutally honest, I lack "original" imagination, but can run with "visual" stimulation. This led me to search online for house designs to steal. Here's the one I stole: Stolen Who House



This is my dimensional sketch scaled from stolen image.

Based on the bitter reality of *GBH the First's* multiple failures, I now use foam core for the roof as well as house pattern to approximate the final dough thickness. This meant a drive to Walmart to buy said foam core. Once I was home with foam-core, triangle, ruler, T-square and tape, I had a model.



Day TWO

ROOF ELEMENTS

Looking for dramatic visual impact, I pictured a star-covered roof that was green, red and sparkly (wait...is that even a word? Sparkly? Sparkle-y?). This led to the idea of using pizzelle cookies, which are thin and kind of star shaped. Here's how I thought that would go:

1. Make pizzelle dough
2. Split the dough and dye half Grinch green and half red
3. Bake for 30 seconds in a pizzelle iron as I flash-back to moi, 10-year old Indentured Servant loaned out to make hundreds of pizzelles for every christening, First Holy Communion, and Sewer Hookup in our neighborhood.
4. Sear fingertips lifting cookies off the hot iron and sprinkle with edible glitter
5. Pray that the cookies won't soften by invoking St. Stifficus, Patron Saint of Viagra Users.

Then a fortuitous event happened: while trawling through Walmart (yet again) looking for inspiration, I found red and green star-shaped ornaments for \$0.99 cents. Score! This meant I could skip the entire paragraph above because, while ornaments made in China are chock-full of carcinogens, they won't soften and slide off the house. Choose your battles, folks!

Next: how many to buy? Each sparkly (hee!) star was 4" in diameter and my roof was...? was...? oh crap, what size was my roof? Oh ya, 10" x 12". That meant nine per side, so I bought 6 of each color to insure coverage.

(Anyone else just do the (extremely incorrect) math here?)

While at Walmart, I looked for fabric for the roof-top toy bag, envisioning a bright red velveteen sack edged with fluffy white trim and tied with a green cord. Reality check: there wasn't a single bolt of velvet OR velveteen in ANY color, let alone bright red. I settled for some dull red felt covered in lint and put a check next to "bag" on my mental list of "Things To Do." But my heart wasn't in it.

***You're a monster, Mr. Grinch!
Your heart's an empty hole.
Your brain is full of spiders.
You've got garlic in your soul,
Mr. Grinch!
I wouldn't touch you
With a thirty-nine-and-a-half foot pole!***

Day THREE

TOY BAG

On the way home from work, I stopped at the grocery store to buy ginger for the...uh...*gingerbread*. And there, hanging on an end-cap was my own little Christmas Miracle: a large red velveteen Santa hat, edged in fluffy white trim. Huzzah! I knew immediately this would work for the roof-top toy bag. (I spit on you, boring, linty red felt!)

DOUGH

I doubled my standard GBH recipe using the dough hook of a 6-quart Kitchen Aid and let it chill.

*You're a mean one Mr. Grinch
You really are a heel.
You're as cuddly as a cactus,
And as charming as an eel,
Mr. Grinch!
You're a bad banana,
With a greasy black peel!*

I laid the pattern down to test the size and...sure enough, not enough dough in the corners. Then I lifted the pattern up and...Oh! for the love of Cindy-Lou Who!

I *forgot AGAIN* to put wax paper down first so the pattern wouldn't stick to the dough! Which, of course, it does and yep...there it goes, tearing when lifted. You would THINK after ALL this time....

Roll out the damn dough again.

OKAY IDIOT! WAX PAPER FIRST, THEN the pattern. Trim around the edges with a sharp knife or X-acto blade. Lift off the excess dough (wrap tightly in Saran Wrap just in case you need a bit more later. Not that you will...but you might. And then won't *you* feel silly if you threw the scraps away), slide the parchment paper to the edge of the counter, bring your cookie sheet to the edge of the counter and gently slide the parchment/dough into place. NO LIFTING REQUIRED.

At this point, I marked where my windows and doors would be, using either a cookie cutter or a knife. You can remove the window dough, but I typically leave it in place and cut it later. Or...you know, maybe I don't. I'm flighty like that.



Okay. Dough baked and cooling. Check!

Off for more inspirational shopping at Wally World where I found not one, but TWO sleigh ornaments! I dragged Larry along as a sanity check and dangled first one, then the other sleigh in front of him: *"Which one looks more like it could barely support a large bag of toys and a terrified dog hanging off Mount Crumpit?"*

Larry's terse answer: *"Buy both"* validating once again why I married this man.

Then I dragged him to the toy department where I had spotted small-scale model animals on the last visit. There were lions, tiger, bears, cows, pigs...and dogs. Four or five different breeds, in fact, but most were in a rigid, Westminster Kennel Club stance. Larry and I stood in the aisle miming each dog dangling off the sleigh to make a final selection. In retrospect, we may have looked a bit...*odd* to other shoppers. But then it was 9:00 PM at Walmart and who is to say what is odd.

Day FOUR

HOUSE CONSTRUCTION

I had built a 21" square base by layering four sheets of recycled cardboard and Duct-taping them together. Praise Dr. Seuss! this was a non-edible house so I used a hot glue gun to join the sides rather than traditional edible Royal icing. Cans were used to support the outside walls while the glue sets.



(Ten Bonus Points to the first person to notice that I glued the side walls flush to the foam core when they SHOULD HAVE been tilted to follow the angle of the front & back walls. But we're hiding that dirty little secret behind us and moving on...)

Now...as if you needed *any more proof* of my anal retentiveness:



To solve this problem, I slit the base cover and shoved a shim underneath poor, unbalanced GBH.
So that now...{ahhh...contented sigh}

After the house was erect, I piped Royal icing over the seams to mask the glue and provide additional support. I pinned on a few stars for a visual check and decided it was...meh, so-so. I'd rate it a 4 out of 10 and figured this was because there weren't enough stars to provide the dramatic effect I was shooting for.

I would be wrong.

Since I had neglected to cut OUT the windows while the gingerbread was warm (see earlier comment re: **flight-y adj**) I attempted a trompe-l'oeil of Cindy-Lou Who (*who was not more than Two*) peering out a window trimmed with Grinch Green icing. I piped the second window, but hated it so much that after the icing dried, scraped it off. I also hated the door design I had pressed into the dough. Good grief! This was not a good start! This was only the front of the house and I already had problems with...well, everything.

Forging ahead, I slathered Royal icing on the roof and began setting the green stars. Nine stars per side, right? Oh, so very wrong. First off, the roof wasn't 12" long; it was 15". And since I didn't have enough roof material, I disassembled the stars, shredding my fingers in the process and ended up with three different sizes. I eventually covered the entire roof, added the candy elements, stood back to assess the situation and....hated it.

I walked into the other room, turned around a corner and quickly glanced back at GBH, attempting to catch it off-guard and scare it into looking good.

Nope. Still Hated It.

MOUNT CRUMPIT ELEMENTS

Since the roof was giving me angina, I decided to work on Max the Dog, the sled, the bag and the roof. I had Max, but needed an antler and not just any antler, but one proportional to our little dog. So I walked around the yard, looking through plants and trees in search of these:



Now pause for a moment to put this in perspective: The entire front of GBH was a design disaster; I hated the roof; it was possible that I had completely shredded my fingerprints off with those stars; and yet, I was wasting valuable *Moments Of My Life Which I Can Never Get Back Again* searching for the right twig to represent the right antler. It was time to admit my priorities lacked...oh, I don't know...focus? I'm sure there's a 12-step program for this somewhere.

Another fact you should know is that I need reading glasses. For. Everything. That means there are reading glasses in the kitchen, the living room, my bedroom, the bathroom, etc. At one point while testing various "antlers" on Max, I looked around for my reading glasses. What I DIDN'T REALIZE was that I had a pair shoved on top of my head, a pair tucked into my shirt front and I was WEARING a pair. While LOOKING for a pair.



***...and the Grinch said: All I need is a reindeer!
So he took his dog Max, and he took some black thread,
And he tied a big horn on the top of his head.***



Here is my antler'd Max.



Here is my blistered flesh, seared raw while making sure that the antler was held in place with hot glue. I still have no feeling in it

I made a foam-core ramp that the sleigh tracks could sit on and tested the toys in the bag. All good.



When I went to bed that night, I was satisfied the Max/sleigh/toy-bag elements would work, but still despised the roof design with a bile-rising hatred.

***You're a foul one, Mr. Grinch!
You're a nasty, wasty skunk!
Your heart is full of unwashed socks.***

Your soul is full of gunk,

Mr. Grinch!

The three words that best describe you are as follows, and I quote,

"Stink, stank, stunk!"

Day FIVE

It's the (damn) ROOF (again!)

When I awoke at 4:30 AM on Sunday, I walked into the darkened kitchen, turned on the light and still hated that roof with a fury that knew no bounds. So we had the following conversation:

"Roof, you are dead to me. You sleep with the fishes."

And then I got in my car and drove to...where else? WALMART. Because they're open 24-hours a day and because I could. So there I was, alone in the festive Holiday aisle when I found Christmas Miracle #2: glittery stars...BOXES OF THEM...with 20 stars per box! More than enough stars to compensate for inept math. I bought EIGHT BOXES of glittery Chinese toxic waste because I wasn't about to make THAT same mistake again.

The first thing I did was rip off those finger-shredding green stars and test the new ones. Yes! My anal-retentive brain was immediately happier and the recycled candy elements also worked. Battery-powered LED lights were held in place with T-pin and covered with Royal icing because everything looks happier covered in Royal icing. Really. Try it some day.

We could finally put this bitter page behind my multiple personalities and move onto a new chapter of angst, known as....

THE BANNER:

In the dark, scary world that is my imagination, I envisioned a banner made up of triangles stretching across the width of the display. To get the banner high enough I first thought of wooden dowels, but canceled that idea because it would be too rigid & un-Seussian. Then I found a 2-foot, 1/4" diameter spring which was flexible but too heavy, so it was back to the wooden dowel. Once it was mounted, I happily realized the dowel would bend slightly, so my Confidence Meter swung back UP! Of course, bending meant vertical tension when attaching it to the base so I had to ensure it was mounted securely.

That's when I realized if the wooden dowel was embedded directly into the 4-ply cardboard base, it would be less likely to slip and could offer some vertical support. I began sharpening the flat wooden end into a point and suddenly had a flashback of watching *Lord of the Flies* as a kid. I could see the proper English schoolboys, dancing and whooping around a bonfire on their ship-wrecked island, sharpening their sticks and crying out: *"Kill the beast! Cut his throat! Spill his blood!"*

Whoa!!! What was THAT doing in this festive holiday moment! (shakes head, thinks happy puppy dog thoughts. You know...puppies that didn't have hot glue poured on their forehead.)

With a saddened heart, I realized the wording would be too small if I used one triangle per word. So I printed out the saying as one sentence and hung it between the rods. Rotation dynamics majors take note: the addition of a single sheet of paper caused the banner *and* both dowels to bend toward the roof of the house. My Confidence Meter plummeted so fast it vibrated.

I decided to try reversing the tension on the poles and ended up with series of ropes and knots that looked like a Cirque du Soleil stage set designed by the Marquis de Sade.



Tableau of Marilyn and Larry Pondering **The Problem**

Marilyn: *So, what do you think?*

Larry: *It works*

Marilyn: *But do you think it works?*

Larry: *I just said so.*

Marilyn: *You don't think it's too busy?*

Larry: *I. Just. Said. It. Works.*

Marilyn: *Okay.*

(One Mississippi. Two Mississippi. Three Mississipp...)

Marilyn: *"I HATE IT!!"* ...at which point, I grabbed the scissors and freed GBH from bondage.

Larry walked out of the room, mumbling: *"Why does she even ask?"* And that's when I had my third Christmas Miracle at 10:30 PM Sunday evening.

"Sometimes the questions are complicated and the answers are simple." ~Theodore Seuss Geisel

As I looked at GBH, I realized the banner poles looked like....flag poles!

So I raced back to Word and I changed all the text,

I turned on the printer...but what to do next?

I cut out two banners, I cut them just right

This must work, it must...it was already night!

I fixed up the windows, I fixed up the door.

I mixed up some icing and covered the floor.

"Then the Grinch thought of something he hadn't before.

Maybe Christmas, he thought, doesn't come from a store.

Maybe Christmas...perhaps...means a little bit more!"

