

As I was saying



Jack Hilsher

A terrific holiday toy you can make at home

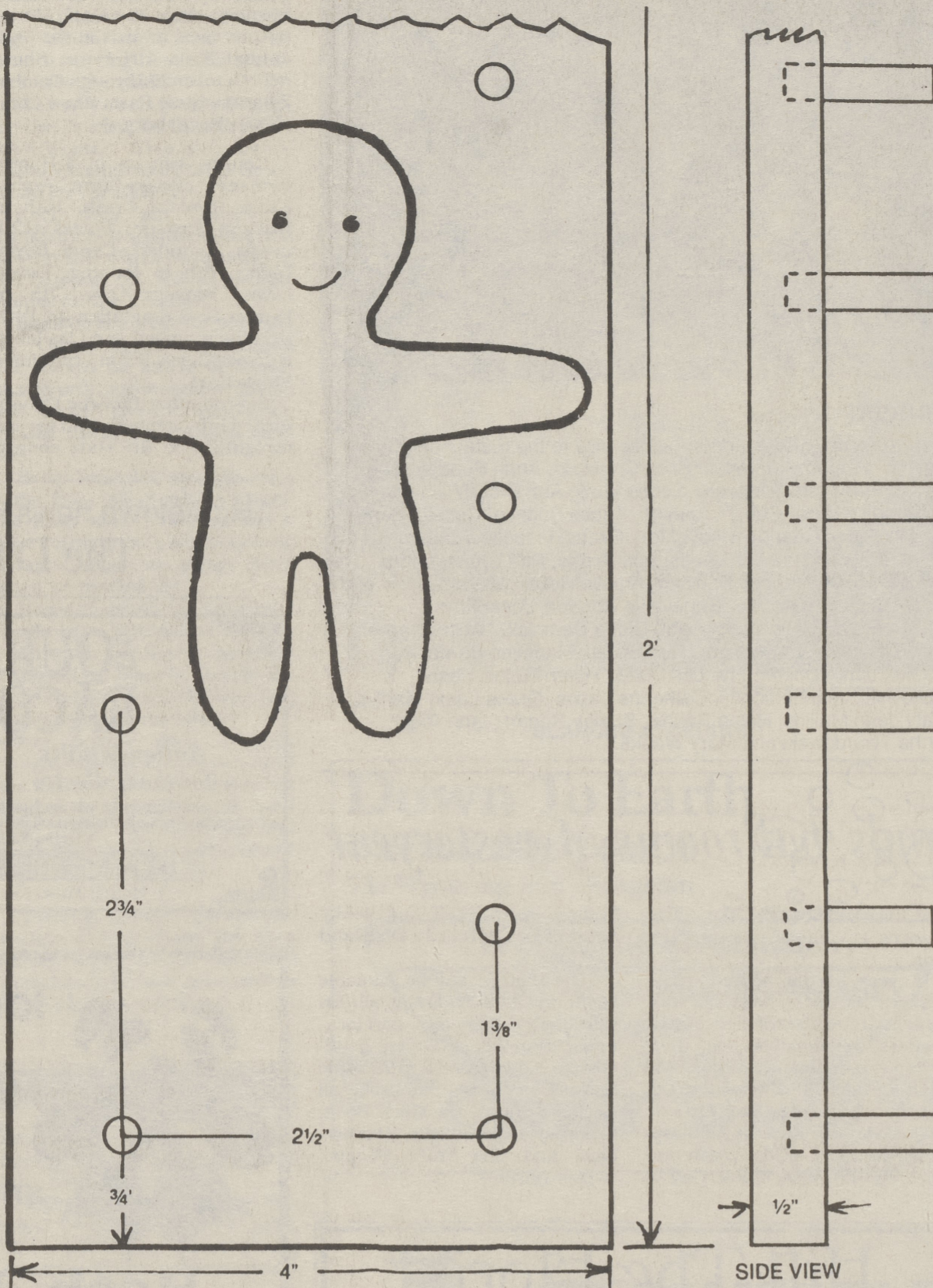
In keeping with the season that is fast creeping up, here is a story about a terrific Christmas gift for kids. It is a hand-crafted wooden toy described elsewhere and while you don't necessarily have to build the toy to enjoy the story, it helps. It can also help brighten Christmas for some youngster. If that means a grandchild, you should know that a toy made by a relative is usually handed down as an heirloom. Wooden toys are scarce items these days, surrounded as we are by plastic. There is something intangible about a wooden toy, whether painted or not, that seems to have an eye appeal that plastic lacks.

The toy featured, "Ziggedy Man," has just that...terrific appeal, especially when it is in motion. Yes, motion, for it comes from a book called "Working Wooden Toys," by a Scotswoman named Marion Millett, written while in her 80s.

I made Ziggedy Man for my granddaughter, who was learning to work a "walker" and she would come hell bent from anywhere in the house as soon as she heard the toy operate. For if the little wood man is placed at the top of a pegged two-foot board and then released, he makes his way down the complete length of the board by himself, emitting a satisfactory plonkety-plonk sound as he slips from one peg to the next one down.

There are undoubtedly some readers who, at this point, think to themselves, "Jack has lost his marbles," but you have to see and hear the toy operate to understand how you can get hooked. I have seen grownups unable to pass it by without at least one trial. As for kids, even if the man hops off part way down, that accident causes squeals of delight.

Oh yes, the story: I wrote a senior column in The Times Leader back when, plus a feature or two. A "How-To" piece on Ziggedy seemed like a good bet. All I had to



Scale: Full Size. (Note that hole spacing dimensions are center to center.)

do was convince my editor, Jim Hunyadi, who was also their food editor and other stuff besides. Jim was a colorful newshound type, colorful in the sense of yellow shirts and purple flowered ties. He also chain smoked and love to eat, anything, anytime.

Hunyadi liked the Ziggedy idea but had to be talked into my other idea. During the '72 flood over one hundred 1/4" wood dowels floated into our yard and I kept them. (One does not throw away that many dowels!)

So I asked Jim to print this next to the Ziggedy Man feature:

FREE DOWEL OFFER

"The Times-Leader has a supply of 1/4" dowels, each long enough to make one toy. They are yours free for the asking, one to a person, as long as the supply lasts. Inquire at the Information Desk."

Jim agreed, reluctantly, because he said these offers never work,

we're wasting space, and we'll be lucky if we get 10 replies.

The feature appeared on a Thursday morning, late in November in 1988. About eight o'clock that morning the T/L receptionist called me at home and asked, "Jack do you have something to give away about a toy?" She had five requests already.

"Yes, dear, I do," I replied, and saddling up old Paint I took my entire supply over to North Main Street and they were all gone inside of three days! (The Hunyadi reaction, when I bragged about a sellout that he didn't even want to print, was only a grunt!)

So not to be outdone by my previous publisher, *The Dallas Post* also has a free dowel offer. If you will stop into our office and ask the receptionist, a free 1/4" wood dowel long enough to make one Ziggedy Man will be yours.

And Happy Holidays to you!

Step by step instructions for Ziggedy Man

You'll need these tools: Drill (hand or electric) with 1/4" wood bit; coping saw or jig saw (borrow one?); medium and fine sandpaper; acrylic or non-toxic paints (optional).

You'll need these materials: A two-foot long board, 4" wide and 1/2" or more thick. White pine is best, but any smooth and flat board will do; two feet of 1/4" wood dowel; a small piece of 3/8" thick plywood about 4"x5" - do not substitute here. This is for the man and must be 3/8" plywood; some wood glue.

Cut and sand one edge of 18, 1" long pieces from the dowel. Make them all exactly the same.

Very carefully, mark up the board with center dots for the peg holes and drill them about 1/4" deep. Copy the drawing exactly.

Glue in all the pegs so they are perfectly upright.

Trace the man pattern on the 3/8"

plywood, or, paste the pattern on cardboard, then cut and trace around it. Either works.

Cut out the figure; watch the underarm curves and the arm lengths. These are critical dimensions that make the toy work.

Sand the man to remove sharp edges and send him down the board, tilting the board slightly. (Some affix an eye hook to the top so it can be hung up.) If you have followed instructions and dimensions your man will "plonk" his way down the first time.

If not, you can "fine-tune" everything...use fine sandpaper. Maybe the underarm curve needs more angle; maybe the arms, or one only, are a bit too long. If you watch where the figure "hangs up" you'll be able to figure it out.

If, after considerable fine-tuning, you still don't have free and easy downward travel, don't despair. Make another man!

Free Dowels

The Dallas Post has a supply of dowels needed to make Ziggedy Man. If you'd like one, just stop by the office any week day between 8:30 a.m. and 5 p.m. to pick one up.

Ziggedy Man details are printed by permission of Sterling Publishing Co., 2 Park Ave., New York, N.Y., distributors of "Working Wooden Toys" by Marion Millett.

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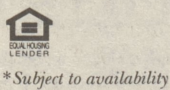
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