

5/May/Fixing Things
Gail Balden
Word Count: 667

Early in life I discovered I wasn't Miss Fixit. There must be great satisfaction in repairing things, getting that drawer to close smoothly, the toilet to flush properly, the lawn mower to purr once again. We women know it is written in stone somewhere that the man of the house is Mr. Fixit, but the sad truth is that some aren't, so we might as well get our own toolbox. The recent Trash Bash, a splendid community event in its 10th year at Cart'M, was a reminder to recycle, reduce, reuse. One way to do that is to fix things rather than give them a toss.

Whenever my father visited me in my early apartment years, the comments were the same:

“What's wrong with the toilet?”
“Oh you just need to hold the little lever down and it works fine.”
“You should get that screened door fixed.”
“It's ok, just slam it and it'll close.”
“What about that pop-up toaster; it doesn't pop up.”
“It will if you just pull up the lever when the toast is done.”

My father began repairs figuring he was helping out his hapless daughter. Not that my father was the master of his own household when it came to fixing things. My brother, sister and I thought the hot water faucet was always on the right—wasn't everyone's? We flipped light switches down to turn them on—didn't everyone do that? When my father finally bought my mother an automatic washer he hooked up the drain hose to the kitchen sink where sometimes it stayed and sometimes it flew off spraying water all over. If an automatic washer was supposed to free the woman of the house so she could do other things while doing the wash, ours missed the mark. It required constant watching just in case it went bonkers. Years later, while doing the wash at my brother's house, I had to pull up a chair in the basement where the washer was located to watch it in case the sump pump didn't drain the water. Watch and dry became our motto, not wash and dry.

My first house, complete with a white picket fence, cost all of \$7,000 in 1972. But the previous owner was no handyman either. The kitchen had no cabinets or counters, a screen door to the bedroom didn't allow for any privacy, and the living room wall was full of nails. Whenever the owner wanted to hang up his coat, he just pounded another nail in the wall and hung it up. We had to go out and get a serious toolbox first thing for that charmer. That was when I learned how heavy dry wall really could be.

I've learned to do a few small repairs: oil the squeaky hinge, fix the toilet float, and assemble the lamp using a Phillips screwdriver. Recently I bought a pink handled hammer at the Tillamook Home and Garden show. The niftiest thing about it, besides the fact that a portion of the price went to breast cancer research, was that the end of the

hammer has a notch to hold a nail. No more smashed fingers; you just insert a nail in the hammerhead, give a swing and bam, done. Why didn't someone think of that sooner?

Fortunately my grandson Ethan likes to drill and hammer things. Though only 2 ½, he loves to sweep and vacuum too—my kind a guy! While using Skype, a program that allows me to call via the Internet and see my grandsons, I see Ethan sitting in front of his dad's laptop. He shows me his book on trucks and points to the screen with a big smile, "Nana in the computer." When I call a week later, my son yells out to Ethan, "Want to see Nana in the computer?" "No!" he says and proceeds to start vacuuming. I can see him in the background struggling with the hoses and plugs. I wonder how he'll be as Mr. Fixit?

Gail Balden teaches writing workshops in Manzanita and throughout the U.S. She can be reached at gail@creativejourneys.net.