

Bill Rea ? I?m no handyman

It's been a little more than 14 years since I entered the wonderful world of home ownership, and while there are definite advantages (bragging rights probably being the man one), the whole concept can be a big pain in the butt.

In the first place, I am by no means a skilled handyman, although I do have my moments, when I get around to them. For example, the latch on our front door seemed to be sticking a couple of weeks ago. Not to worry. I keep a trusty can of WD-40 on the premises, so I was able to address the situation. It meant taking apart the doorknob, with the pessimist in me wondering if I would be able to put it back together again. But the latch was working when I was done, and I was quickly able to forget all the WD-40 I spilled on the floor (I was able to get it cleaned up before my wife saw it).

But it is true that I am dreadful with tools. My late father was a master at them, which proves there are certain talents that cannot be inherited. And my dad used to be impatient as hell with my ham-handedness.

The problem is being skilled with tools is in demand a lot if you own your own house, which means I frequently come up wanting. But I'm always willing to give what is commonly known as 'the good old college try,' although there are limits.

For example, I recently noticed a small problem with one of the downpipes outside the house. I'm pretty sure, however, I will be able to figure out a way to fix it myself (I hope).

Although I'm not particularly athletic, I am capable of a certain amount of prowess. I proved it over the last couple of months with the way I brandish a snow shovel. I usually try to be the first one on my block with a cleared driveway.

But there are points where I have to draw the line.

For example, if I detect a problem with the pipes and the very obvious solution doesn't present itself right away, I won't bother with it. I know next to nothing about plumbing, meaning I do know enough when it's time to call in the pros. I realize it's expensive to get a plumber in to fix the results of reasonable wear and tear. But it's more expensive to get a plumber in to fix the results of my screw-ups.

When it comes to cars, I think there are few of us who are really qualified to address problems that frequently crop up. The stupid among us tend to ignore them and hope they go away, and keep driving until the car quits, often at very inconvenient times. Smart people like me don't let them fester, but get the car into the shop so the pros can deal with what I will hope is a little problem, rather than waiting to be towed for something major.

If we have a health issue, don't most of us tend to see a doctor ASAP?

The furnace falls under the same category.

You will, of course, recall the bone-chilling temperatures over the last several months. There was one Tuesday morning when we got up to conditions that seemed a lot colder than normal. Beth fiddled around with the thermostat, and then announced with a tone in her voice that I have come to dread, 'I don't think the furnace is working.'

I responded with a groan that was a little louder than I had intended. The fact that it was Tuesday was one of the complicating factors, since that is deadline day for the Citizen, meaning there's a lot to do at the office, and Tuesdays often see me working until well after midnight. That meant I didn't have a lot of time to be hanging around the house entertaining a repair person.

On the other hand, the thought of living in a freezing house had very little appeal. Ella the cat certainly would not approve, and she's not one to suffer in silence.

In the end, there was only one course of action open to me, so I made the call and agreed to stay at home until the pros arrived.

Fortunately, the two guys who were dispatched were pretty prompt. They were at the house a little more than an hour after I had called. They would have been there even sooner, had they not gone to the wrong house, which aroused suspicions of a neighbour, which meant I had a couple of cops at my front door. No worries, however. The required explanation was brief, and the incident ended with chuckles all around.

Fixing the furnace didn't take long either. The house has been nice and warm ever since.

But that wasn't the end of the problems.

Although Beth and I live in a townhouse, I believe we have a certain right to gloat, because unlike many of you, we have three toilets (four, if you count Ella's litter box). Since there's just Beth and myself, one of us waiting for the other to quit hogging the can is never a problem in our household.

We noticed a problem with one of the toilets some weeks ago, but since time was rather tight, I was able to shut off the water supply and let things sit until things settled down. I grant that wasn't the best solution, but it worked for the moment.

That moment ended when one of the other commodes went on the bum (I think there's a pun there). Time notwithstanding, this matter needed to be dealt with, and soon. All concerned realized that if the third one went down on us, my sense of humour would

have been stretched to its limits.

That meant another half day of me sitting at home, this time waiting for a plumber. Fortunately, that was a Monday, which is a bit less stressful than Tuesdays. And since I had my laptop with me, I was able to get a bit of work done while listening to the guy rattle around with the pipes in my house. And much to my relief, the bill was significantly less than what I had been expecting (or should I say fearing).

So those problems have been solved, but there are a number of other chores that need to be done, especially as the weather improves. There's a lot of cleaning to be done. While that, thankfully, does not require a lot of dexterity with tools, it does demand a certain dedication to neatness and order, which I don't possess (another thing that drove my old man nuts).

And then there's the yard work. That's something I don't mind too much, although the physical toll starts to impact on me fairly quickly these days. My aging legs aren't what they once were, and squatting and kneeling can get very painful in a matter of minutes. And you have to do lots of that if you're going to do much planting or weeding.

My inclination is to let Beth worry about all of that.

Besides, I have my income tax to worry about over the next several weeks, which helps get me off the gardening hook.

Pity you can't write plumbers and furnace guys off on your income tax

