

MR. FIXIT

The other day my daughter undertook some routine home repairs. She was attempting to install a towel holder and a toilet paper roller. She borrowed the tools: a stud finder, drill, screwdrivers, and a level. She called back hours later to report that:

- 1) The stud finder couldn't find studs
- 2) Once the studs were found by drilling about a hundred holes, the screw holes in the towel holder weren't spaced to go into the studs.
- 3) The wallboard was thin like paper and the screws just pulled out of it.

Well, I'm not an unkind person, but I was kind of glad to hear her complaints. These chores are the easy kind of things that baffle me, and it's comforting to know I'm not alone. Maybe it's genetic. Through witnessing the cursing and struggles when I attempt simple tasks, I'm not even asked to try difficult ones anymore. My wife has always looked upon me as an utter incompetent around the house. I may have thought I was a big deal at my job, but I was rightfully deemed a nitwit at home.

I know there are many men who can perform routine household fix-em-ups, in fact enjoy them, just as there are men who can fix a car, who understand black holes, can hit a golf ball, and those who passed chemistry in school. Do not count me in that number. I recall a neighbour in Montreal, inept like me, who had worked for weeks lining the walls of his basement with cedar shingles. They can be quite attractive as a wall covering in a rustic sort of way. He had even cut carefully around doorknobs and shingleized the doors. (OK, I know "shingleized" is not a word, but it ought to be). He proudly took me down to the basement when he was finished to show me the results of his labour. Two of his teen aged kids were lounging indolently in front of the TV. I'm sure he had to step over and around them, as though they were dead bodies, to get the job done. I admired the cedar smell but noticed that many of the shingles were cracked and split, stuck out oddly from the wall, and I caught my sweater on one of them.

To my everlasting shame, I spoke up. My mouth frequently speaks before my brain shifts into gear and analyzes the potential impact of my words. I said, "Frank, you've put all these shingles on upside down!" And he had. He'd put them on with the fat side up, so they split when nailed. They stuck out randomly from the wall and looked like a dog badly in need of a brushing. I clamped

my hand over my mouth, but too late, one of the kids had heard it. "Oh Dad, are you ever a loser", this pathetic hoser of a kid said. I mean it's one thing to be inept, as he was and I am, but it's quite another thing to be made sport of because of it, especially by your kids.

We make a big deal out of kids, describing them in loving terms like puppies or kittens, but like these pets, they can be a real pain sometimes. I know most parents brag about the accomplishments of their children, building them up as paragons of work and citizenship, but deep down they secretly marvel that the little maniacs have accomplished anything in life. The parents bask in the accomplishments of their progeny, indirectly hoping that these will be attributed to their wisdom as parents and caregivers. Subconsciously, they are sighing in relief that the kids are not doing hard time in Milhaven. Grandparents have no perspective whatsoever. They would perceive that their grandchild was in Milhaven to give civics lessons.

Well, I got off topic a little bit here. We were talking about skills around the home.

There appears to be no way to learn repair and

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