

GADGETS

“Uncle Richard and auntie Floe are coming” shouted my younger sister as she ran from the ‘phone through the house so that we all would know that a momentous event was about to occur. Richard was my mother’s brother and Floe, his wife. We had lived in the same house with their family when we were kids. They had moved to the U.S.A. some years before and visits were rare.

We had a great reunion and shared a meal. When clean up was about to begin, Richard said “wait a minute I’ve something to show you and something for you to hear”. With that he picked up a relatively small box that he had hidden under the table, pushed a couple of buttons and the machine began to whirr. “This is a wire recorder” he said, “now you can hear how you all sound at dinner”. I won’t bore you with the unbelievable noise of 7 people talking and eating but this was the first wire recorder I had ever seen. I’m sure some of you have done the same sort of secret recording as have I when subsequently tape recorders became common place.

Richard always had something new and different and perhaps this was the birth of a love of gadgets that I have to this day. In those days, the early 50’s until today the number of new inventions is mind boggling and the corresponding growth of gadgets is stupendous.

The Dictionary defines Gadgets as: an often small mechanical or electronic device with a practical use but often thought of as a novelty. As I sit here in the kitchen writing this I can see at least 3 drawers that contain a myriad of gadgets, some of which are used often and others such as the “Bean Slicer and Stringer” from Australia only rarely since I’m not sure now how all the blades are supposed to work.

During our sailing years one of our dear friends was affectionately called Gadget Bill since he collected these things with enthusiasm Valerie began calling me Gadget John after Bill passed on since I love these often ingenious devices that make short work of difficult chores when they work as intended.

One gadget that has no practical purpose except to amuse and enable men at a party to discuss Physics and Dynamics as if they knew what they were talking about is a trick train that we have. It runs on batteries and rolls down a grade, climbs a vertical tower while executing repeated somersaults, causes a section of the track to swing through space and deposit it on a track on the opposite side and on and on. I bought this a number of years ago in a toy shop in Florida for one of our nephews but loved it so much I kept it. We set it up every Christmas and everyone is fascinated by it.

Valerie and the kids are always on the lookout for gadgets to give as gifts. Allan, who probably has the same fascination as me has given us numerous things like pens with lights above the nibs to shine on the page, myriad miniature flashlights and key chains, beautiful stainless steel units that hold clocks, barometers and relative humidity gauges. One that is really practical if we have a power failure is a “Power Generator Dynamo Alarm Clock Radio Torch”. This gizmo has two small batteries which run things for a short time and a hand crank which, with 1 min. crank will power the torch and with 3 min. crank will run the A.M./F.M. clock radio for 20 min. Great eh? It sits in a drawer in the night table waiting for an emergency.

We were at dinner with friends the other evening and, since we’re all interested in food and its preparation, inevitably the subject of tools and gadgets came up. The hostess and I had each received for Christmas a “Dalla Piazza” from Switzerland. In essence it is a measuring cup with a bottom that moves to change the volume based on the setting you select on the handle i.e. # of tbsps. or fractions of a cup. It’s good for dry or liquids and doesn’t leak. The other wife present, who is also a marvellous cook and gadget aficionado gazed with envy at the hostess’ cup and vowed she would get one. We later checked at Freeman’s in Belleville, where Valerie had bought ours and they said they couldn’t keep them in stock.

The men in the group spent considerable time comparing gadgets in their cars such as external thermometers, compasses, automatic headlights, rear view mirror automatic glare adjusters and other vital components.

I now have, courtesy of Valerie, a Master Craft Laser Level / Estimator. This gizmo will show a line to hang stuff (like the T.V. ads), measure distance, add distance measurements, and calculate area and volume. Wow, I can hear you say since you all know by now how handy I am and how

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