

The Retired Carpenter

In my dentist's office there is a disgraceful piece of carpentry done by me. I see this poor workmanship every time I sit in the chair in that room, making me feel ashamed. It is the 1/4 round trim along the sink top. The gap at the corner is unsightly and could have been corrected with a little creative carpentry.

My dentist, says he doesn't know what I'm talking about. It looks fine to him. Yeah, I answer back, you wouldn't treat somebody's mouth like that, leaving a big gap, would you?

He just smiles at me with his exemplary teeth and walks away.

This disgraceful carpentry happened years ago when I remodeled his office and we traded services instead of money.

At my next cleaning appointment I learn that Dr. Taylor is on vacation. Just the opening I was looking for. That gives me all week to do the job. I procrastinate the rest of Monday.

On Tuesday I drive down to the dentist office, look the job over, take off the offending piece of trim.

On Wednesday I make a new piece of trim, paint it.

On Thursday I charge up my finish nail-gun. It won't shoot. I can't call the tool repair shop because my cell phone service is out. I drive up there. I walk across the showroom floor, nail-gun dangling from hand.

The sales clerk, emerging from a tool aisle, stops, glances at the gun and emits the phrase, "Wow, I haven't seen one of those in years!"

I don't know whether to feel proud or ashamed. I feel both alternately.

As I walk back into the repair shop, the service man in coveralls looks up, stares down at the gun I put on the counter and shakes his head sadly. "I threw away my last battery for that model just a few days ago."

He picks up the gun, examines it. "I can't even get parts for this thing anymore." He fiddles with battery connectors, makes the gun fire, hands it back.

"I only need it for 3 nails," I say to him.

"That much life you've got," he assures me.

"You mean it or me?" I say with a smile, proud of my geezer joke.

I walk back through the showroom floor looking for the sales clerk in order to wave my still-working nail gun in his face, but he is nowhere to be seen.

I show up at dentist office at 4:30 p.m. with functioning equipment, put the new piece of trim in place, shoot nail.

Nail splits piece.

NOW WHAT THE FUCK AM I GOING TO DO?

Today is Thursday. The office worker doesn't work on Friday. Dr. Taylor will be back on Tuesday. Monday is a holiday.

The office worker, Kayla (a high school friend of my daughter's) takes pity on me and tells me she has to come in tomorrow, Friday. She has to make the calls that she couldn't make today because the phone service was down. Good. We arrange to meet midday.

Meanwhile I have to figure out how to make a new trim piece, paint it, and install it with my archaic equipment in the one hour I have to complete the project.

I go back to my workshop, glue and clamp the existing piece of trim which the nail split instead of making a new one, fill nail hole. I am going to need to hand-nail the trim next time. I don't know if I remember how to hammer. I look in five different outbuildings before I find my finish hammer which has started to rust. I don't have any finish nails. I threw them away years ago when I bought my finish nail gun. I make some finish nails by cutting off the heads of some thin galvanized nails I have lying around since it's ridiculous to go to the hardware store for three finish nails.

I should drill some pilot holes so I don't split the damn thing again. I remove the tray from drill toolbox, set it near the edge of the work bench, peek down into toolbox for the bit index.

My glasses fall off. While reaching to catch the glasses I knock the tray containing screwdrivers and bits and other connectors onto the floor. Stuff scatters everywhere.

I put on the glasses upside down, take them off, put them on right. No drill index. I kneel down to pick up the scattered tools, hear the clunk of something sliding under the work bench. I ignore this and pick up the tools and put them back in the tray. When that is done I look under the workbench to see my yellow/black tape measure half buried in sawdust and cobwebs.

It popped loose from my belt when the flab from my gut squeezed out while bending over to pick up the tray. You fat ass.

I go into the toolroom for my other drill toolbox, bring it into shop, open the lid. The lid falls off (the plastic hinges are worn out). The drill index lacks one bit, but has the bit I need.

I drill the holes, fiddle with toolbox lid, work it into position and hammer it back into the hinge slots (with my newly found finish hammer; I'm starting to make progress) refasten the lid and carry the toolbox back into the toolroom.

While walking across bridge plank between shops, the plank gives way, falls a few inches onto the platform below, a soft landing because the platform is also rotting and receives the heavy plank without even a vibration. I am still vertical though at a lower elevation. I step up onto the floor of the toolroom, put away the toolbox.

I head down to the dentist's office to meet Kayla and install repaired trim piece. I'm thinking I can get it on with two nails instead of three. No need to waste a nail.