

Cottage Memories

Chronicles of A City Boy's Life In The Country

PUMP PERILS

Pumps are the great cottage equalizer. No matter how much design, decor or dinaro has gone into your abode. When the pump stops, the world crashes to a halt and castle transforms to hunt camp. Enterprising realtors could charge one dollar for the structure and many other thousands for a working pump. The ad could read: "Two thousand square foot pump house for sale."

If I exaggerate, it's because I'm a pump peril survivor. Like that November the water stopped. My usual cursory dicking about with the pump, such as checking to make sure it was still there, produced the usual no result. So I decided the problem was the foot valve but chose not to call our pump man for help.

I say "our pump man" because I feel a close and proprietary interest in someone to whom I have paid an endless stream of cold cash to repair my dicking. He has a new van; I have the same old shaky pump. He exclaims "they don't make them like this anymore!" I think he's paying off his new RV. Certainly, he has his own key and name-embossed coffee mug in our cupboard. Meanwhile, I remain closer to pump purgatory than pump paradise.

But I digress. Foot valves have a nasty habit of being located below the surface. Ours being in the lake, under bloody cold water. So there we were again, the wife in her dingy to watch me freeze or drown, and I in my ill-fitting dry suit. The combined natural buoyancy of that suit and my suet kept me bobbing in the bay like a float with a fish on – until clutching a concrete block as ballast, I sank to the valve. It was blocked by zebra mussels, which I managed to scrape off while warding off hypothermia with hot thoughts about the fool who didn't let the pump man do this.

Fortunately, I usually don't get wet when the pump packs it in. That's because there is no water. Like the time I was dicking in the dead of winter and lost the prime. The wife accused me of being past mine. "Never fear, says I, "all we need is water - we can melt snow!" Do you have any idea how much snow it takes to make a cup of water? In an hour of scooping, melting and pouring

I'd barely filled an eye dropper.

Several hours later, after several gallons had disappeared into the primer hole, I concluded we must be filling both the pump and the holding tank. Otherwise, where could all that water be going? Then the wife suggested smartly: "Did you close the valve? Maybe it's going down the line and back into the lake, honey?"

Wondering just how much snow I'd have to melt to fill the lake, I relented and called our pump man. The worst part of pump penance isn't the outlay of cash or my failed dicking. What really gets me is the uncertainty. At odd hours I find myself ambushing a tap or sneaking in for a quick flush, to reconfirm that the pump is still pumping. When I have water, I hoard it in every conceivable vessel against inevitable pump-induced droughts. The wife says there are so many containers of water lying around inside that neighbours are offering to re-shingle our roof.

So the next time the pump perished, I called everyone for help. Everyone but the wife, who wanted a crack at it too. Three of us macho types spent a frustrating afternoon to no avail, exhausting our collective patience, expertise and beer supply. As I began to speed dial our pump man, I smirked to the wife: "Why don't you try it, honey?" I'd barely said "Hello", when I heard the pump kick in and water flow. "Just calling to see how you like your new RV," I said, and hung up.

The wife is now our resident pump expert. She maintains and repairs; I handle the wood, BBQing and outhouse. And rather than make embarrassing admissions to our pump man, I quietly had the locks changed. His coffee mug mysteriously disappeared last year. The only thing I pump now is iron.

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