

HOME WRECKER!

Power Tools & the Meaning of Life: A Man's Perspective

By Bill Skubi

Dad, can I help?" Eight-year-old Austin posed the question as I leaned against the board to hold it in place. I had a level in one hand and an electric screw driver in the other. Holding three inch-and-a-quarter sheetrock screws in my mouth kept me from reflexively snapping, "No!" I handed Austin the screwdriver, mumbled and nodded some sort of affirmative, placed the first screw in the countersunk hole, and the boy drove it in perfectly. We got a rhythm going and in no time our beautiful new hearth and old mantle was secured in place. Think about it. Just like the water powered looms and treadle sewing machines of 150 years ago, a rechargeable electric screwdriver enabled me to exploit child labor.

Austin has seen me use a hand-turned screwdriver, but I know they must seem as quaint and curious to him as the eggbeater-type drill I played with as a boy. Hand tools are great, but they are a thing of the past. For one thing, it's hard to find good hand tools today. I know because I recently tried to cut a piece of lumber with a brand new Stanley handsaw, and it was mighty tough sledding. A few days later at the beach house I needed to cut a few inches off a sheet of 5/8-inch plywood (to stick under a sagging mattress). No power tools here, so I took a real saw, a Stanley at least as old as me, and — zubba, zubba, zubba, zubba — it cut through that tough old plywood just like a son of a gun.

That didn't mean I wasn't wishing the whole five minutes that I had my Skilsaw; I was. It does, however, mean that watching the building of our house 104 years ago would have been quite a different scene from the building site of today where work can't even begin until the temporary power pole goes in.

As near as I can tell power tools divide up into four basic groups. Things that cut and scrape (saws, sanders, routers), things that hammer and drive, things that suck and blow (compressors, sprayers, vacuums), and, most recently, things supposed to replace basic common sense and reasoning (computers in all their varied forms). Let's take the devil by the horns and look at computers first.

Dominant Technology

All the time we were planning and building we referred to the back room off the living room as the Den. But ever since we set up the computer it has been known as the Computer Room. Think about it. Den is not only a word, but a direct link with the animal world; its meaning is tied to the mysteries of refuge, renewal, and rearing of young.

Personal computers have been around for less than 20 years (we've owned one for fewer than ten) and POOF! the meaning associated with it — instant visual/verbal communication, virtual replacements of natural surroundings, highly specific motor activities in response to preprogramming — take over com-



Power washing: How did we ever live without it? Photo: Skubi.

pletely. I love 'em (the newspaper you are reading would be impossible without them), Austin loves 'em, but Jan hates the darn things. If you don't own a personal computer (another one of the great oxymorons) here's what it can do for you. It's a combination typewriter, typesetter, and printing press. Studies show that this is the only thing that most people use their computers for. Every letter, recipe, story, or diary entry you type into your computer and save, you can print as many times as you like, whenever you like. This may not seem like a big deal, but the personal computer has knocked the centuries-old conventions of the printing and publishing

trades into a cocked hat. Cynics used to sneer that we had freedom of the press in this country for everyone who owned a press, which is still true, except now millions of Americans own their own mini-presses.

If you're in business, computers can do a lot of bookkeeping. Enter the amount of a billing, and the computer spits out an invoice. Enter the amount of a payment, and it keeps track of income. Computer-based bookkeeping and tax programs whiz millions of Americans through income taxes this time of year.

Computers will also plug you into the withering pace of technology, whether you desire this or not. For 70 dollars you can buy a fax/modem which makes it possible for

your computer to talk to other computers over the phone lines. What the other computers will tell yours in the course of this routine cybergossip is that your computer (no matter how new or expensive) is already obsolete.

Who's the Best?

Machines deal in force and efficiency; conscience, forgiveness, good faith, even common sense, it turns out, are not part of the program. Right when we were in the middle of delicate discussions with our glass and insulation contractor about a refund for overpayment, their computer sent us a bogus bill for an additional \$1,300. Likewise, it came as kind of shock to us that higher-ups in the bank would only give us a one-month extension, till the end of March, to paint our house as part of our construction loan. This brought Jan's brother Craig out over the weekend with a pressure washer.

Once again a man with a power tool was coming to the rescue. As he groomed the house I remarked to Austin, "Your uncle Craig is one of the best." With absolute sureness he corrected, "Uncle Craig is the best." As I write, the house is prepped and ready to paint, it is my birthday and raining to beat the band. We have exactly ten days to get two mild and sunny days to paint. That's where the oldest power tool of all comes into play — called faith. □

Next issue: The Home Wrecker picks the top ten power tools of all time.

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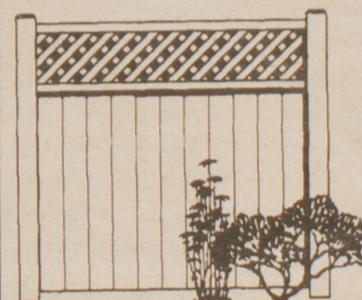
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April 4-10

The Cosmic Weather Report: As the Sun penetrates the heart of Aries, the Ram, the quest for selfhood achieves new meaning, compelling us to become who we are. At first glance, this sounds redundant, but just as plants need poetry and children in the womb need songs sung to them to ensure genuine emergence, the core nature of each of us needs courting and coaxing to "Come out, Come out, Wherever you are!" We're conditioned to smell like chemical reproductions of flowers, to plug our pores with industrial gloop in order to avoid sweating, to duplicate the pure white smiles of airbrushed media models, and solve all our problems in time for the half-hour commercial break. Underneath this house of cards lies something poignantly nascent, aching to emerge, and This One calls to us now from the Heart of Creation.

Aries (March 20/21-April 20)

It's your time to shine like a knight on a Quest Perilous which is bound to fail at every point of it that's charged with haughty ego, and guaranteed to succeed in all of its allegiance to true evolution.

Taurus (April 20-May 21)

A momentary fragmentation effect occurs at the end of the week, splintering previously solid self-grasps into strangely juxtaposed counter-images. Redefinition of hopes & dreams is the ticket.

Gemini (May 21-June 21)

Understand how the things you haven't been able to accomplish are due to you being ahead of yourself on a visionary level but behind in the physical plane. Remedial steps, while prickly to the ego, are balm to the wounded will.

Cancer (June 21-July 23)

A major renovation project in emotional reconstruction is two-thirds complete. Stick with the plan (even if you have none) in order to emerge by May Day into the sunlight spheres of Spring Festivity.

Leo (July 23-August 23)

New power surges through your center, and can be enhanced by learning to spot Leo in the sky—the backwards question mark high to the South is the Lion's mane. The brightest star is the dot of the question. Leo's hind is triangular, and the cat is as big as the Big Dipper.

Virgo (August 23-September 23)

The Divine Art of Ordinary Life takes a new twist as you're challenged to make a stand for something you don't really believe in but must speak up for anyway, in order to rhythmically punctuate an otherwise unfinished sentence.

Libra (September 23-October 23/24)

Balance is achieved in the dance of relationship which provides the clearest mirror of selfhood. If you don't like what you see, instead of blaming the glass adapt the belief that self-change is in order.

Scorpio (October 23/24-November 22)

Recent polls reveal Scorpions divided between those who feel I'm out to get them and those who appreciate my astrological surfboard to help them meet battering Cosmic Waves. In late '95 Pluto finally abandons its 12 year Scorpio Tsunami-Generating Station. Hang in there!

Sagittarius (November 22-December 22)

The adolescent in you gets to sit down with the adult for a holds-barred pow wow session which reveals the power that childhood vows have had on you since age ten or so. Find new ways to honor the child without indulging or repressing.

Capricorn (December 22-January 19/20)

Enjoying your greatness demands the courage to transcend the anti-self taboos which religious and social conditioning place like chastity belts over the virginal soul dying to be born within you.

Aquarius (January 19/20-February 18/19)

You've been prevented from premature fulfillment, which would negate your higher purpose. Instead of wasting a secondemoaning your fate, live life as a workshop in meaning and value unglued to results.

Pisces (February 18/19-March 20/21)

We're born into the electromagnetic Sea of Impressions which mass consciousness perceives as the solid world. This means that you're one of the charter members of the 12-Step Neo-Atlantean Amnesiacs Recovery Support Group. Remember who you are!

April 11-18

The Cosmic Weather Report: Like puppets coming alive in a darkened workshop, our various sub-selves—created by stray thought forms and disowned emotional cross-fertilizations—have gone ahead and populated the shelves of the world with odd critters, grotesque caricatures and zany jesters of the imagination that are far more real than we know. Galactic Command Center now gives us the mission to peer through the night time windows and witness the dance of "Those Whom We Are & Aren't with Those Whom Others Are & Aren't," also known as "Modern Inter-Relationship." Thursday morning when Mars enters Aries we're given the ability to march right down the middle of this farcical melodrama in order to rewrite the ending based on what really is rather than what appears to be.

Aries (March 20/21-April 20)

Last week's knightly errantry amplifies to a spiritual warriord that tests your soul in the flames of radical self-renewal. Become a spear of light that dispels dark ignorance, or a healing scalpel that removes the poisoned dart.

Taurus (April 20-May 21)

The old world craftsman in you gets more of a say in things, as you inject love into Gepetto's workshop of wooden boys aching to become real in a world where it's more fashionable to remain wooden.

Gemini (May 21-June 21)

Combustion Danger: High, if you confuse the lure of false praise and ego aggrandizement with true creative response to a dark and difficult situation, but if the flames consume your ego, it's worth it.

Cancer (June 21-July 23)

Become the puppet master who illustrates hidden archetypal motifs in the guise of kidlike entertainment. Master your craft by caring enough to let go of what's not yet known, and kick off your strings!

Leo (July 23-August 23)

Sweeten the breath of life which pulsates through you by funneling full spirit into every grain of your voice. Let the Spring mountain air carry your melodic essence to the lower reaches where the trenchwork is nearing completion on the forefront of Post-Millennial Society.

Pisces (August 23-September 23)

Dualities gradually approach a showdown that won't culminate for a week or two but heat up enough for you to apply preventative maintenance. Imagine yourself on the far side of your most insurmountable obstacle, and act that way.

Libra (September 23-October 23/24)

Directing. Conducting. Orchestrating. The Sorcerer's Apprentice in you rises to new heights in order to weave many disparate strands into a cohesion more sweet for its discord, more true for its errors and more meaningful for its unspoken tragedy.

Scorpio (October 23/24-November 22)

Overidentification with murky and insidious levels of the current drama is a chief employment hazard of your current job description: Mine Sweeper for the Somnambulistic Western Cultural Line Dance.

Sagittarius (November 22-December 22)

Speed is of the essence in opening a gap of non-doing through which history's voltage can leap across and sizzle away to future frontiers without burning you.

Capricorn (December 22-January 19/20)

Contrast the roles you've recently been playing with an oblique approach to a whole new character that has things to say that no one else could, which you should pay close attention to.

Aquarius (January 19/20-February 18/19)

Negative thought forms must be eradicated at first peep before they have a chance to profligate like a plague of pestilence. The best pest control is clean mind, consecrated will.

Pisces (February 18/19-March 20/21)

The Galactic Overseers give you an open space to create whatever you need.

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MS, cont'd from page 28.

and also very knowledgeable about MS and treatment plans. She also had a very positive point of view. "It's all very well to listen to doctors who do what they can medically, but a lot of the treatment is up to you. As long as you believe you will get well, the better chance you have of recovery and going into remission."

Ruth is dark and curly-haired like Michael and adamant in her opinions. It's people like you, I thought, who give others the faith to accomplish miracles. Michael told a joke about himself and some of the difficulties he experienced in moving. His face crinkled into smiles, and I was reminded of the chronicle of self-care written by Norman Cousins called *Anatomy of an Illness*. When Cousins discovered he had a crippling and irreversible collagen disease, he locked himself away from other people and watched funny movies non-stop for months. This apparently resulted in remission and, he felt, put him on the road to recovery. The theory being that laughter releases endorphins, morphine-like painkillers produced by the brain that give us a sense of comfort and calm.

As an observer, I found myself drawn to these three, who not only exhibited pluck but maintained a sense of humor. When I commented on this, Michael responded, "That's part of the cure — being able to laugh at yourself. That's very important. The less stress the better control you have over the situation."

Then the meeting was over, and we got up to go. I realized that in a short period of time I had become close to these three people in ways hard to explain. I felt a reluctance to part company. Even more, I felt a deep sense of gratitude.

Jill called me the next day to apologize.

For information on MS, or for the support group nearest you, contact the Western Washington Chapter of the National Multiple Sclerosis Society, 2328 Sixth Ave., Seattle, WA 98121.

Eleanor Nelson is an artist living in Port Townsend and a regular correspondent to the Island Independent.