

## Buckets and Buckets

*By Dennis Knight*

*There's a hole in the bucket, dear Liza, dear Liza,  
There's a hole in the bucket, dear Liza, a hole.  
Then fix it, dear Henry, dear Henry, dear Henry,  
Then fix it, dear Henry, dear Henry, fix it.*

Back in 1960 at Carnegie Hall, Harry Belafonte and the wonderful Odetta sung this old folk song in a duet. You can still hear that very performance today on the Internet.

Henry and Liza dramatized the importance of buckets in society. They are perfect vessels for carrying volumes of water, and before the advent of pumpers, fire fighters formed brigades, passing water in a line, bucketful after bucketful.

To extinguish their thirst, the ancient Greeks and Romans used buckets for the bringing of wine, bucketful after bucketful. In later centuries, before beer was bottled, if one wanted a brew outside of the saloon, it was carried out, bucketful after bucketful, in galvanized containers called growlers. Gourds served nicely for those purposes as well, and the ancients even employed bladders taken from domesticated animals when they were finished using them.

For a bucket to be a bucket, in my humble opinion, it should have a wide, flat bottom to keep it upright. One may be chiseled from a rock, I suppose, but the weight would make it inconvenient. Early people learned to shape and fire them from clay, but they were fragile. Durable leather buckets have been around for centuries. Coopers today still craft buckets from wood, useful for any liquid, but especially nice for churning ice cream. Metal buckets, lightweight and durable, have been the most popular since the Bronze Age.

Tom Sawyer used a bucket to get the fence painted, but he delegated the odious chore of applying the bucket's contents to another boy, and somehow got himself paid in the process. I'm not as clever as old Tom, but I have the same attitude as he did. A bucket is a very handy thing to keep paint in, but someone else can get it out. With a brush or a roller, doesn't matter.

One who dies is said to have 'kicked the bucket.' A theory about the origin of that term holds that it comes from execution by hanging, where a noose would be tied around the neck of the executionee who would be standing on an overturned bucket. When the executioner kicked the bucket away, the executionee would become the executioned.

If there's a hole in your bucket, as Liza has expounded, then fix it, dear Henry, dear Henry, with a straw. If the straw is too long, cut it, dear Henry, with an axe. If the axe is too dull, sharpen it, dear Henry, on a stone. If the stone is too dry, wet it, dear Henry, with water which you may fetch with your bucket, dear Henry.

But there's a hole in my bucket, dear Liza, dear Liza, a hole. And that, dear reader, is the predicament of my entire essay.