

## THE UN-HANDY MAN

*By Fred Hobbs*

Being a part of the “white collar” working class, I was not known for being very “handy” around the house. Years ago, our family lived across the street from a man nicknamed Skeet who was a contractor involved primarily with modernizing kitchens and bathrooms and other residential-oriented construction jobs.

One day in a conversation between my wife and the contractor’s wife LaVern, the subject of the respective husbands’ occupations came up. When told that I was in broadcasting, the somewhat boorish neighbor lady replied, “He’s not good with his hands, so he doesn’t work, then?” To LaVern, work meant using one’s hand to hold a hammer or a drill or maybe a chain saw. Like Skeet did.

While neither my wife nor I appreciated LaVern’s definition of what “work” means or what uses you can apply to your hands, I was forced to admit, and my wife cheerfully concurred, that I was a consummate un-handy man. I can scarcely drive a nail straight. Probably, I would choose the wrong nail for the task, anyway. I can replace a light bulb successfully. That is, I used to be able to perform that task until I moved to Windsor Gardens. My apartment is outfitted with some very handsome light fixtures that require unique small bulbs. They do not screw in, but click in place when properly positioned. I can’t seem to master the procedure.

Given this very fundamental lack of mechanical knowledge or basic dexterity, I decided sometime ago to attempt to work hard and long enough to earn the money necessary to hire various handy men. (Yes, to engage in gainful employment without using my hands except to type, hold a phone receiver or adjust a microphone.)

With the use of rollers, good drop cloths and masking tape, I did, however, become a fairly proficient interior house painter. Being prudent, I confined that exercise to the basement, storerooms and semi-hidden places. Professionals were hired to decorate the kitchen, living room, dining room and main floor bedrooms of the houses we occupied over the years. Not wishing to embarrass our neighbors, I refrained from most outdoor hands-on home improvements. Luckily all of our houses were made of brick, so minimum maintenance was required. When needed, a bricklayer, stonemason or tuck pointer with good hands was always available for hire.

And when those nasty plumbing problems arose, I could use a “plumber’s helper” in most cases, but to change the inner-workings of the tank, I always called the “head guy”, no pun intended. I was wise enough not to even think of tinkering with electrical outlets or wires. No shocks, small fires or “funny electric smells” for me.

For many years, I looked to neighbor (and good friend) Robert to be our handy man. He even installed the new-style bulbs in my apartment when needed. His fees were reasonable. A free lunch, an hour or two of political discourse added to the modest pay after he finished a job was sufficient.

To be truthful, it does bother me a tad to be so inept at tasks compared to “real men with worker’s hands.” Mostly I take in stride. Back in the 1970’s, we even hired Skeet to remodel our kitchen. And, LaVern never mentioned my hands again!