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Justin Harter

My Day With a Toilet

Avid readers of my columns will know that I am not very handy. Do you remember when my car wouldn't start so I had to go out and buy a new one? Or do you remember when my deck stain sprayer exploded all over the back of my house? Or how about the time I had four heater repair men parade through my house because the only thing I knew to tell them was, "it clicks funny." Well, now we've come to plumbing.

A couple weeks ago I got up at my usual 5:00 am and hit the ground running right to the bathroom. I proceeded to do what I needed to after 7 hours of sleep and then flushed the toilet. Upon flushing the toilet, it made a huge sucking noise and then proceeded to not do anything. No water rushing in, all of it rushing out. I'm relatively alert even when I just wake up in the mornings, but this caught me off guard. "It's a toilet", I thought. "How does it just not work? A toilet is the most reliable thing since the toaster."

That same night was the first really frigid night Indy had seen in a while, so my natural thought that something was frozen somewhere. My solution was to take a shower. I thought that maybe with the steam from the hot water it might decongest the toilet tubes.

Turns out, that's not a viable solution. Seeing as how that was about as successful as taking a shower to thaw frozen pipes, I decided to consult my "Home Maintenance for Dummies" book. I really am not making any of this up. The book was a gift from my Realtor when I bought this house. Unfortunately, "toilet doesn't fill up with water" wasn't one of the chapters.

So, my next step was to do what any young adult would do. I searched for "toilet doesn't fill up with water" on the Internet. That yielded 194,000 results. Picking a few at the top of the list resulted in such luminary solutions like "try jiggling the handle." I felt confident in my jiggling abilities and yet it yielded no success. Another possible solution was to "check the floating ball thing". That seemed plausible, but even I could tell the ball was working and relatively new. Plus, the use of the phrase "floating ball thing" on toiletology.com led me to believe someone as dumb as me wrote that.

By this time in the morning it was time for my trek into the office. However, I was worried that if the pipes were frozen at any point they might explode. I think I read that in a magazine once. Fearful of coming home to a house flooded with water and

two cats stuck on top of the refrigerator attempting to paw together a makeshift ark out of cereal boxes, I decided to call in and take a personal day.

Now that I had all day to sit and figure this thing out, I went back to Googling online. The handwriting was on the bathroom wall: I needed a plumber. I wasn't afraid of calling a plumber – I have a home warranty that covers these sorts of problems. But I had one last ingenious idea of taking a bucket and filling the tank up with water myself. I thought that if I poured water in it might “prime” the toilet into working again.

I grabbed the bucket and started filling it in the bathtub. In the meanwhile, I went to go use my other bathroom to make sure it was okay and it was. I came back, turned off the water and lifted the bucket over the toilet tank. From there, I “slowly” poured water into the tank. This, from a bucket, was more force than my toilet was used to and the bleach tablet I have in the tank dissolved almost instantly in a sea of blue and white chunks. I tried flushing as my last attempt and the water just drained out. Now I have a broken toilet AND it's turning blue.

I gave up and called the home warranty company. The young woman on the phone asked what I needed. Not knowing what to say, I replied with “My toilet doesn't work.” She paused, thought for a moment and said, “Uhh...is it *clogged*?” I responded with, “No. I'm pretty sure it's not clogged.” She cautiously said “Okay” and proceeded to call one of their plumbers and he arrived four hours later. I don't remember his name, but let's call him Carl. Carl comes into the house and I show him to the bathroom. He took one look at the back of toilet and said, “Oh. You have one of *those*.” He popped the valve off the wall, popped it back on and twisted it left and right. Water came rushing back in. This took him three and a half minutes.

And this is why plumbing is a licensed profession.