

The Basement 2.0



By Anna Von Reitz

It has been over a month since the massive 7.0 Earthquake that had its epicenter a block and a half from my home in Big Lake, Alaska.

I still have to go through the house every day and keep straightening the pictures on the wall, thanks to all the after-shocks.

I want to thank my readers for their helpful hints and suggestions about properly storing fishing rods and other topics. The fishing gear is now neatly secured and my husband is (slowly, but surely) oiling and cleaning the reels. I wish that were all we had to do, but it is not.

There's been some fun along the way. Disasters always bring things to light and force you re-think things in surprising ways. Each one we survive (Miller's Reach Wildfire (1996) and 7.0 Earthquake (2018)) yields new insights.

Last week it was Minus 19 at my house, and just up the road from us, my Paralegal friend suffered Minus 32. Needless to say, it was a good time to hunker down like toads in a hole and sort through wreckage in the basement, so that's what we did. We ran across an entire box full of old music CDs that had crashed and scattered all over the floor:

Cat Stevens.....Joan Baez.....Gordon Lightfoot..... Neil Diamond.... The Who.....Poco.....Lobo.... Simon and Garfunkel..... Carly Simon.....The Rolling Stones..... Steppenwolf..... ZZ Top..... Anne Murray..... Joan Armatrading.... The Pointer Sisters.....Lionel Ritchie..... Jimmy Buffett..... Bryan Ferry..... Dire Straits....Chaka Khan.... Merle Haggard.... Johnny Cash.....Guns and Roses....Fleetwood Mac..... Moody Blues..... Led Zeppelin.... Bee Gees..... ABBA..... Kenny Loggins..... Maureen McGovern.....Jefferson Airplane, Jefferson Starship..... Ringo Starr.... U2.....Joe Cocker....Randy Newman.....Sting....Van Morrison....the soundtrack from "Merry Christmas, Mr. Lawrence"..... David Bowie.... Aretha Franklin..... Motown, Motown, Motown....Diana Ross.... "Pipeline", "Telstar", "Classical Gas"..... Kenny Rogers..... Dolly Parton.... and on and on and on. And that's just the Pop/Rock/Country Cross-over. That isn't even beginning to count all the Classical and Jazz.

I bet we had 300 albums in that mess. Easy. And most of them we haven't listened to for years, because, frankly, there hasn't been much time for sitting around listening to music since saving this country became a priority.

So, we cranked up the sound system and listened to all that we had and all that we forgot and we continued to sort and throw away and reorganize ---- which is a lot more fun with music than without.

Thus I faced the Rogues Gallery of empty, half-empty, dried to a paste, and otherwise coagulated cans of paint and varnish, stain and solvents, which every home collects and which nobody ever throws out because we think --- usually wrongly --- that we might need some "for touch up" later on.

In actual fact, of course, it's a rare day that any touch up is undertaken until it's time to paint the whole wall again --- and the touch up paint remains sitting in cans in the basement for generations. I had cans of touch up paint for walls that no longer exist.

Strangely, I don't feel alone. I bet there are millions of Americans out there who have a shelf (or shelves) of ratty paint cans that should be properly disposed of.

Well, better late than never, I have herded mine into open cardboard boxes and steeled myself for the trip to the dump and the extra dumping fees.

Serves me right. I will feel better when it's done and my basement will certainly be cleaner and better organized. I just wish I had come to the task with a conscious will, instead of being prompted to do it via now-dented cans of paint and stain and varnish all over the floor.

Among the other discoveries, I found that a coffee urn in the office had somehow broken its base with two perfectly spaced half-rounds of plastic missing, and no harm to the functionality or appearance of the the coffee pot at all. The only way you can tell that the damage wasn't part of the original design is by picking it up and feeling the rough edge. Otherwise, it looks like it was made that way.

This result is even more amazing when you consider that this urn is a stainless steel cylinder with a spout and a domed lid and it fell about eight feet from the top of a shelving unit onto a cement floor.

I guess I must have a need for a large coffee urn in the future? Perhaps you are all going to drop in for a cup of java? The pattern of what is saved and what remains after a disaster is a perennial mystery.

Every lampshade in my house is toast, but all the lamp bases survived without a scratch.

My beloved and well-used Crock Pot sustained a dent, but it still works just fine and to tell you the truth, I hardly notice it and nobody else around here cares, so --- welcome to our new, rearranged reality of dented Crock Pots and "miracle" coffee urns.

The poles of our Volley Ball set did not survive. They took the hit to protect the fishing rods and reels. Now, I am looking at the net, weighing my options. New set? New poles? Give up playing at my age?

The Tetherball, soccer ball, and basketball are all squashed flat, which probably formed the cushion that saved my AeroGarden, which, like the coffee urn, fell from a shelf near the ceiling to the cement floor and survived. Even its delicate fluorescent bulbs are intact. Go figure?

And, after a brief discussion with my husband, we have decided to give all the big power tools we have been hoarding in the basement for the last fifteen years to a younger neighbor, a talented carpenter who suffered his own personal-life disasters on top of the Earthquake this winter.

I have in all my "spare time" been dusting and cleaning and oiling up cross-cut arm saws, tilting arbor saws, planers, table saws, nail guns, joint planes, planers, sanders, compressors, and all the various parts, pieces, knives and blades that go with these worthy tools to a new home.

We haven't had any significant use for all these tools since we finished building this house, so we aren't going to hang onto them and let them gather dust when a young man needs them to earn an income for himself and his family.

Yes, it is very physical work.

I get dirty and dusty and have plenty of encounters with cob webs. My hands and nails get filthy on a regular basis and wearing gloves doesn't help a lot.

Why, you say, don't I hire someone to come in and do this?

First of all, I have been supplementing The Living Law Firm and our researchers and historians out of my retirement funds for a long time. It doesn't make much sense to divert funds from that and ask for others to make similar donations to The Cause, just so I can avoid some hard, dirty, physical labor.

Second, when it comes to a disaster, you quickly find that you are often the only one who can make the decisions involved.

Who else can put my Ant-Bait in a place where I can find it next spring?

No, there are many things in life --- going to the bathroom, deciding to throw out old school papers, and sorting through family photographs --- that are uniquely ours to do. You can't hire it done.

A disaster puts it all in your face, all at once --- and the dust and rubble and shards of glass are really secondary to the business of keeping and throwing away and giving away and reorganizing.

What might have been a pleasant enough wintertime project, like putting all the old family photos in order and into albums, is suddenly front and center because they are scattered all over the floor and under overturned shelving units and stuck like feathers between bags of flour.

And that is just the way it is.

I am looking forward, some months hence, to crawling my way out of the chaos, to a day when I have found new homes for my youngest son's extensive (and I do mean--"extensive") Thomas, the Tank Engine collection and his even more extensive (if possible) holdings in Playmobile sets. I think he had them all.

Knights and castles.
Pirates and desert islands.
Frontier forts, covered wagons, cowboys, cows.
Farms galore, complete with critters of all kinds.

This may sound like I was an innocent observer of all this play-time largess, but of course, he was spoiled rotten to the extent that I could spoil him, and I allowed a lot of "investment" in play and imagination and adventures that Hollywood never dreamed of.

We are looking for a Pre-School or Church or Hospital or Library program that has the resources (and space) and commitment to set up these miniature worlds and make them available to more than just one or two children.

As sad as I am to see them go, it's like the woodworking tools. We had them when we needed them. Someone else needs them now.

This odd sorrow is part of living in the slipstream of life, a part of what gives life balance and grace --- that we pass things on, and let them find their place as blessings in other homes and other lives.

Better by far that we all move on and willingly share our blessings with others, so that more people can thrive and dream and be happy and secure---- and all the "basements" and "attics" of our lives get cleaned up and organized into the spaces that we need now, as we flow onward, too.

What I needed at thirty was a great deal more and different than what I need facing 70, a lesson I have shared with my children. My husband and I have not waited to pass on family heirlooms and treasures, but have liberally gifted them on to our children as soon as they established homes of their own, and passed on to other relatives, also.

That, too, turns out to be a blessing --- because none of those ancient and precious things have been burned in the wildfire nor smashed in the earthquake. Only our own possessions, of our own generation, have been damaged and lost.

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