

The Big Sucker

For years the nine-foot drainpipe at the front of our cottage has been sneakily filling up with rain. None of the previous owners or tenants noticed it, but typically I just couldn't resist stumbling upon it by accident. Although to be fair drainpipe inspecting is not the sort of thing you would set your alarm clock for. My wife however, was delighted by my apparent diligence.

"Oh well spotted!" she said as if I'd caught sight of a missile hurtling towards the house and somehow managed to deflect it, "how did you find out?"

I told her it just came up during a routine drainpipe and gutter inspection and for a moment I thought she was going to faint from excitement. Actually I had been up a ladder fiddling with the TV aerial cable and on the way down I happened to notice the drainpipe was full to the brim with horrible dirty water. Obviously it was blocked somewhere so I got the longest bamboo cane I could find and gave the pipe a sound prodding. Judging by the length of cane I was using the pipe was blocked near the bottom and probably had been for quite some time.

"So is it the only one?" asked my wife, catching me off guard. I hesitated for a moment and then assured her it was.

"So you've checked them and you've only got one to empty?" she continued, "still I imagine that'll be tricky."

I just smiled enigmatically and said it would be a dawdle because up until then it had been. All I intended doing was pouring some powerful drain clearing fluid down the pipe and standing well back while it worked its rough magic. It never occurred to me I would have to clear all the dirty water out of the pipe first. Before I did anymore damage I got the ladders out and checked all the other drainpipes around the cottage. Luckily for me they were all clear. Over the next few days I kept a beady eye on the drainpipe, hoping the water would go down, leak out, or evaporate, because I didn't have a clue how to get rid of it.

Apart from the sheer annoyance factor it smelled rotten. Strangely it hasn't rained much this year so that water could have been cooking up legions of bacteria long enough for it to become a weapon of mass destruction. At one point I wondered if I could drill a hole through the bottom of the pipe, let the water run out and then plug the hole back up again. I even considered scooping the water out, maybe with a cup attached to some wire. But I couldn't find a small enough cup. A great long sponge was my next brainwave but if there are nine-foot sponges for sale I've never seen them.

"So when is this dawdle of a plan going into action?" asked my wife, sounding worryingly suspicious.

I tried the enigmatic smile again but it didn't work. In fact my wife raised an eyebrow and that's a bad sign. Scratching about desperately for an idea I heard myself announce that I was going to suck the drainpipe dry – using a length of plastic tubing of course, the sort you can buy in a homebrew shop.

My wife's face lit up, apparently it was a brilliant idea and I was a genius. One second I was being applauded and taking a bow and the next I was a numbskull again.

“Look,” I began, “remember when we used to siphon petrol from cars, well it's the same thing. You just stick the tube in, give it a suck and let gravity do the rest.”

My wife couldn't recall siphoning petrol from cars and neither could I so maybe that's what they call False Memory Syndrome, but the principal was sound. When she told her father about my brilliant plan my wife forgot to mention the tubing so I was instantly declared insane. For the rest of the week my father-in-law nursed a terrifying image of me perched on the roof sucking away at the drainpipe as if it were some huge straw.

At one point I thought he was going to be proved right. For a start I couldn't find a homebrew shop or a long enough length of tube. But then I stumbled on an old garden hose and got my scissors out. I wasn't exactly sure what I was doing and I had no idea if the hose had to be a specific length so I just made a wild guess and cut off a really long bit of hose, it was as technical as that. Once up the ladder I started feeding one end of the hose down the drainpipe and needless to say it wouldn't go down because it was curvy and it persisted on getting stuck. I had to keep pulling it out and trying to straighten it but the smell was so bad I thought at one point I was going to reel backwards off the ladder. Eventually I persuaded the hose all the way to the bottom, or at least to the blockage then got down off the ladder and started working myself up for the big suck.

I thought it would be easier if the hose was relatively straight, my sucking power would go further I reckoned if it didn't have to go round corners and along bends. So I stepped backwards onto the quiet country road that runs along the front of our cottage, gave the end of the hose a good wipe and started sucking. The trick of course was to stop sucking the moment the filthy, fetid, rotten smelling water shot into my mouth, but I was ready for it. Unfortunately nothing happened, so I gave it another almighty suck and the country bus appeared from around the corner and slowed down long enough for the passengers to wonder why I appeared to be inflating my house with a garden hose.

Later one of the passengers told me it looked more like I was playing the house, as if it were some huge wind instrument which I quite liked in a surreal romantic sort of way.

Next a car came down the road and stopped at the junction just a few feet from me. I could see the couple looking back at me, their faces etched with bewilderment. And then I had a mouth full of disgusting, gritty liquid. Bits of horrible stuff rolled under my tongue and swam around the back of my molars, some of it, the slimier stuff I think had been alive at some point. It was revolting but quite honestly I felt as if I'd struck oil.

Once I had dropped the hose the water poured out a treat and I bolted inside for ten rounds with the mouthwash.

“Och that’s an old trick!” declared my father-in-law, “we’ve all done that!”

Obviously the sight of someone siphoning drainpipes was at one time quite commonplace.