

## **Mr. Jerry's Shop Class**

*Day 6*

By the end of the day at Jamie's we realize the rest of the week is problematic. We have two more homes on our list, plus an unexpected situation we will not ignore. Larry Randolph has worked unflaggingly with CODRA (Coalition of Disaster Relief Agencies) since the day of the flood. He works with all the church groups to identify worthy projects. Finally, now he has asked for help, more or less. I don't think he asked outright, he wouldn't. But someone mentioned to someone that if we had some time maybe we could help with a little drywall in the front room of his home. It is still undone with these other things going on. The imperative for us is to give him the help he needs. The question is: how to finish three homes in two days and still make Jimmy and Robin's big send-off dinner Friday evening?

Mr. Blackwell, whose home is next, seemed one of the more fortunate. Although flooded like the rest, Mr. Blackwell has made a lot of progress on his house and it is almost completed. The house is rewired and awaiting the breaker box. There is a crow's nest of new wire in the garage where the breaker box would be placed. Most rooms are finished out. The ceilings and walls of the garage and laundry room are the main jobs that remain undone.

A really nice Harley sits against a garage wall blocking our access to the wiring and ceiling. It will have to move. Three of us can barely roll it. The salt water of the flood wasted it.

Still, Mr. Blackwell's house should go fast. We might get started at Steve and Laurie's today (our next project), but we are uncertain about making it to Larry's tomorrow, not to mention Friday's dinner.

Bob and Bill decide that Bob and a small crew will deal with the garage ceiling, and four of us would tackle the laundry room. We will try to get the laundry room done in the morning. In the afternoon we will leave one drywall jack at Mr. Blackwell's with Bob and the others to finish the garage and head for Steven's with the other jack.

As soon as we start the laundry room we run into problems. The old copper plumbing with its faucet heads is still in the walls. Chris cannot find a cutoff valve to remove the faucet heads so he decides to piece the drywall around the faucets being careful not to drive drywall screws into the plumbing.

Mike and I, and soon Tony and Joe Ben concentrate on the other walls. The water heater blocks our access to a corner of the room. We struggle with drywall, working pieces around and

over the water heater to get to the ceiling and walls. After about 30 minutes of jimmying wallboard, one of us bumps the heater and it rocks. We both feel like dummies. The heater isn't hooked up. We only have to slide it out of the way.

We make quick work and finish the rest about the time that Chris finishes his wall. Then we head for the garage to help there but too many people are in the way. Our mudders have caught up to us from Jamie's and are trying to mud the garage behind the guys hanging sheetrock. We are slowing down, or our mud mavens are getting faster.

Mike, Chris, Tony, Joe Ben I then decide it is time to take a quick break for lunch and then head over to Steven and Laurie's. We might get it all done yet.

As we leave I find Mr. Blackwell has come by and is on the walk by the garage talking to one of our crew. I speak to him only a few words because I have Steven and Laurie, Larry and so little time left on my mind. I'm embarrassed but it is the only time I meet Mr. Blackwell. I don't learn his story.

We drive over to Steven's home. Walking up the driveway to the house I notice the brick veneer on the leeward side of the house is displaced about 6 inches outward from the frame of the house. I am surprised it hasn't fallen. Though Steven has not decided what to do about it, there is only one answer.

Steven is in the house hanging drywall and putting up trim. As usual, all the walls and ceilings are stripped down to the studs and new wiring, plumbing, fixtures installed. Steve has dry walled the front bedroom and its bath but the living/dining area which run the depth of the house, the kitchen and back bedrooms await us. He and his wife face a lot of work to move back in. We set up the drywall jack and start in on the ceiling working from the stack of drywall sheet on a trailer in his driveway.

The mosquitoes are really something here even with DEET and Skin So Soft. At Lizzie's they were only a mild nuisance but at Josephine's, Mr. White's and Steve's they have been a horrendous distraction as the day wears on. I guess we are complaining too much about the mosquitoes because the next thing I know, Steve is outside with a fogger, working the ditches and tall grass all around the house. I am a little subdued for my complaining but since Steve has the fogger they obviously bother him as well as us.

Talking to Steve standing on the ladder screwing the ceiling drywall, we learn he's had 3 vertebrae in his neck fused about 6 months ago. There is no way he ought to be on a ladder leaning over backwards like that. We insist he get down and just help us by marking out where in the rear hall he wants us to stop.

Around an hour later Steve's father-in-law, "Mr. Jerry," shows up. He is a big man with a real coastal dialect, talking as one might with pebbles in the mouth. He takes a look at our jack and exclaims he'd hardly even seen, much less used a thing like that.

"That's not the way to put up drywall on a ceiling! You use your head to hold it up. Let me show you, get that piece of drywall and hand me one end."

He climbs the scaffolding, puts the end of a sheet on his head and motions for one of us to get up on the scaffold with him and hold up the other end up. Mr. Jerry asks for a drill and he proceeds to screw in his end of the drywall, all the while lecturing us about the technique.

We get a kick out of his lectures and learn something from them, but we keep asking him to just let us do it, not him. Finally he gets down but then he is all over the place, ordering Tom to set aside that small drywall scrap and use another because he could use the first to piece around a window. Then he demonstrates how to cut out the holes for fixtures, and to piece out the windows and repair cutting mistakes with other drywall scraps.

Steve lets on that Mr. Jerry had a heart attack about a month ago, but nobody can keep him off the work. Mr. Jerry scoffs at all this, said a guy had hired him once just to supervise a crew putting up drywall. The man had threatened to fire him if he didn't stop getting in there and doing the work himself because all he wanted Mr. Jerry to do was supervise. We, of course, are far more concerned about him having a second heart attack.

About mid-afternoon our mud maidens catch us again and begin here. They gave Mr. Jerry a new focus. The women aren't mudding the joints his way.

"I've never had to sand a drywall joint in my life. Give me your trowel and board and let me show you how it's done."

He proceeds to show the technique.

"Wipe just a little mud in the joint on the forward stroke and wipe it off on the back stroke, dabbing just enough mud on the knife to fill the gap."

He looks like an “old master” at work on the ceiling as if it were his canvas. We manage again to get him off the scaffold; however, both crews work with a bit more skill and aplomb than before.

By now we are good friends with Mr. Jerry, Steve and Laurie, and have finished about two-thirds of the work. Late in the day Mr. Jerry loads up his truck as we all leave a smiling Steve and Laurie standing on the front walk. It looks like we can split our crew again tomorrow, Friday. Half will head over to Larry’s while the rest of us finish Steven’s and then end up at Larry’s.

I can hardly believe tomorrow is our last day. We are almost done with seven homes. It looks like that Friday evening dinner and good bye at Jimmy and Robin’s may still be on.