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Part Two

Living an Adventure in Remodeling

By Pablo Raul

When we last visited with Zach and Beth Collins, they were in the middle of a major remodel on their 900 sq ft bungalow. The scope of the work included adding a complete second floor with two bedrooms, a bath, a sitting area, and veranda. In addition, they were adding about 150 sq ft to the main floor, tearing out the existing bathroom and building a new one, adding a full-length front porch. As if remodeling were not enough of a challenge, the couple was also expecting their first child.

In order to save money, the two planned on working on the project as much as possible. They felt their expectations were realistic since both accepted the job would not be completely done when the baby came. Zach knew he would have most of the trim work to complete, the exterior painting, deck, and veranda. They opted not to have their contractor include these phases. Zach explains, "The contract we signed was for 'rough-in' through the sheetrock stage, although the contractor agreed to have his subcontractors install our plumbing and electric fixtures."

By the time they learned they were pregnant the news added a sense of urgency to the remodel. They had already selected the contractor and were well along in the design process. In hindsight, Zach says, "We wish we had taken more time to plan. But as it was, we barely got the project livable before the little guy arrived."

Zach and Beth did their homework. They checked out a library book for advice on how to select a contractor and what to expect during a remodel project. They interviewed 10 contractors on the phone, and had 5 come look at the jobsite. Out of those five, they selected two whom they felt they could work with. Of the two, they chose [Skandia Design and Remodeling](#), owned by Paul Olson. "There were two main reasons why we picked Paul," says Zach. "First, he would allow us to work on the project along with his guys, and second, because his firm does its own design." He adds, "We feel this saved us money in the long run, because when we wanted to do changes they were able to do them without bringing in an



Before construction began on Zach and Beth's, 900 sq ft bungalow.



Exterior construction complete except for the finishing touches on the second-story veranda.



150 sq ft addition includes a new bathroom, kitchen expansion, and second-story sitting room.

outside architect.”

The book advised them to budget 10% to 15% over the contract for any unforeseen changes or extras. Zach now understands that advice. “It seems like every subcontractor who came in had some suggestion that cost more money. The mason said we ought to tuck point the chimney, city inspectors required the electrician add smoke detectors in the existing bedroom, the plumber had to add a pressure balancing valve because of the new faucet. We decided to change the furnace to gas. Since we wouldn’t be able to paint right away, Paul suggested we use pre-primed siding.”

“The hardest part of the whole project was living in the mess,” explains Beth. “No matter what we did, there was no getting around the fact that the place was completely torn apart.” Beth especially felt the stress towards the end of the project.

Even though the major construction was done quickly, the final stages seemed to drag on. The line between the homeowner’s responsibility and the contractor’s responsibility sometimes blurred. Zach advises anyone who is interested in doing a lot of the work themselves to, “Stay involved in the project on a daily basis, and communicate with the contractor.”

Toward the end of the job, Zach found the construction crew to be a valuable resource. “Craig gave me a great lesson on how to install the handrails on the stairs, and John offered to let me use his nailer for the trim. I asked Paul if I could call him for advice, and he was more than happy to help out.”

The project started in October and by the end of February the carpets were laid and the oak floors were finished. Truth be told, every remodel has most of the same expectations and problems to some degree, and the fact that the Collins gave birth to both a new bungalow and a baby simultaneously (and survived) is a testament to their endurance.