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I Enjoy Letting My Daughters Help Me With Home Projects — Here's Why

BY JOSEPH WILSON

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Drywall dust gets everywhere. Even after sweeping, the kids discover a thin film on their toys and cough with exaggerated difficulty.

“Didn’t you just clean up?” they ask.

I try to get them to look at the big picture, “In a few more weeks, we’ll have a whole new basement to play in.”

They don’t look convinced.

Having five people confined to the same house for the last nine months has prompted us to finish our basement. And in a moment of grossly misplaced over-confidence, I decided I could do it myself. Our usual contractor, flush with work from families like ours looking to do some pandemic-era remodelling, was booked for the next couple of years.

Joseph Wilson is unafraid of letting his daughters use power tools. With parental guidance, of course. Read his POV here (<https://www.cbc.ca/parents/learning/view/why-im-teaching-my-kids-how-to-use-power-tools>).

To get the kids to buy into the project, I asked them to look past the ubiquitous dust and suggested they help with the construction. A few years ago we built a treehouse together (<https://www.cbc.ca/parents/learning/view/why-im-teaching-my-kids-how-to-use-power-tools>) in the backyard and, despite their young ages, I taught them how to use basic tools: hammer, screwdriver and paintbrush.

Elizabeth, the second of our three girls, was the keenest to participate this time around.

“Can I use the power saw?” she asked.

“No, we’re going to put up the walls,” I said — a task decidedly less dangerous but one that sounded just as glamorous.

Elizabeth just started Grade 2 and was in the midst of a unit on measurement, so I gave her the tape measure and we figured out the sizes we needed.

“Seventy-one centimetres,” she said.

“This tape measure is actually in inches,” I said.

She looked at me blankly.

“They’re like centimetres, but more... American.”

“That’s weird.”

“Yeah, it really is.”

I scored the panel with a knife and asked her to give it a swift karate chop to break it along the line. This turned out to be her favourite part of the process. She channeled some Bruce Lee clips we had recently seen on YouTube and used her foot, her fist and, at one point, her knee.

After teaching three boyfriends how to do laundry, Terra Atrill, a single mother of three, is making sure her kids do their chores. Read that story here (<https://www.cbc.ca/parents/learning/view/the-life-changing-magic-of-your-kids-tidying-up>).

We hoisted up a piece of drywall meant to cover a structural post and I showed her how to drive in the drywall screws with an electric drill. Her eyes widened: “So cool!” At some point in our work I complained about how much building material cost. A perfect storm of lockdown-demand and pine beetles had at least doubled the cost of lumber (<https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/calgary/lumber-wood-kevin-mason-dave-desormeaux-jayman-built-homes-1.5687201>). Other materials were similarly inflated. So, as drywall cut-offs went tumbling from our workbench, Elizabeth scurried around and made a neat pile of small pieces.

“I’m going to sell them,” she decided.

After we finished for the day, she set up a store in the living room with all the bits of drywall laid out with prices marked on them. She made an open/closed sign (bilingual, of course, because Canada), and realized that the triangular pieces were worth more because they were less common. The smaller pieces were sold at a discount. Still, I had to pay \$0.50 to get back a piece of drywall I cut earlier that week to cover a stair riser.



Her older sister bought some pieces (on “credit,” I imagine, because she knew her sister just pilfered them from the basement) and turned them into impromptu canvases. She drew characters and wrote stories on the pieces that would become part of the walls in the basement (once I reclaimed my drywall bits after the kids went to sleep). Elizabeth was quick to figure out the consequence of this act.

“Can I draw on the walls?”

“Yeah, but it’ll get covered up with paint later.”

Now when I’m building out the basement, I enjoy spotting through the clouds of dust, drywall panels with a cartoon character or a child’s signature on it. It reminds me why I’m working so hard to make our home a comfortable place to live.

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