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Dishes

I like dishes. Clean dishes. I'm not at all fond of making them clean.

When I was a child, I began by thinking it would be fun to wash dishes. I was fascinated by that sudsy water, gradually becoming less sudsy during the washing-up process. But, alas, I was first considered too young and later declared too careless to make dishes sufficiently clean, although the consensus was that I was quite able to wipe them dry. I had just enough chances to wash that I learned that I truly did not like the washing chore, although I still liked *clean* dishes.

After marriage, I saw the necessity of doing the washing up, but I still didn't enjoy it. In fact, I wasn't above postponing the task until my conscience forced me to it. This state of affairs continued for a number of years, with occasional drying help from Paul. Maybe he also washed now and then.

Then, after a number of years, on Rosedale Avenue, a portable dishwasher entered our lives as an appreciated gift. It had four casters that allowed it to be rolled close to the faucets at the sink. After the two trays had hand-rinsed plates and glasses stacked into its cubbyholes, one of us would connect the hose to the hot water tap, turn on the water, and switch on the machine. The lid held a clear glass insert which made the workings of the bottom-located whirling arms clearly visible from above. One or both of us, sometimes joined by our little boys, would hover over our mechanical helper, marveling at our liberation from the tedium of hand washing and drying, fascinated by the swiftly propelled jets of foamy soapsuds, which turned after a bit into clear rinse water. When the process had run its course, the water ceased, the lid popped open so that the dishes and cutlery could dry to a sparkling sheen. The only liability we felt about the dishwasher was that it occupied otherwise useful space when it was not in use. That was not a serious condition, for our kitchen was quite roomy.

Before too long, we moved to Wild Valley Drive, to a house with a built-in, completely automatic dishwasher. No more necessity to wheel the monster into its position at the sink, and a good thing too, for that kitchen was more efficient and much smaller than the Rosedale one had been. Unfortunately, however, we couldn't gather around for our after-dinner entertainment with the water works; this dishwasher had no glass window into its workings. The sacrifice was not great, for such pleasure as watching whirling water palls after a time.

Then came a sabbatical semester when we moved to Oak Ridge, Tennessee, to a fully furnished ridge-top home. To my dismay, the automatic dishwasher did not work when I tried to wash its first load. I called the rental office and got the name of a repair shop. A man came out very promptly, early in the day. When Paul got home from work, the nice man still had all the insides of the faulty machine spread out across the kitchen floor. He admitted to Paul that he couldn't find the trouble. Paul looked at the strewn parts and asked where the motor was. Aha! The man soon discovered that, before the house owners had left Oak Ridge, they had called for repairs, the motor had been carried back to the shop, and nothing more happened. The frustrated man replaced the

parts in the machine and left, promising to order a new motor and install it as soon as possible. Our eleven- and fourteen-year-old sons discovered, for the first time in their lives, that dishes didn't automatically clean themselves. I offered to let the boys alternate washing the dishes, but they quickly declined; I was stuck with that ancient task of hand washing the dirty dishes, but I did enlist the boys' help in drying, for a time a novel activity for them.

The repairman called or dropped by every week or so to report that the shop was still looking for the arrival of the missing motor and that he *would* fix it. If the motor ever came, it was after we had packed up our belongings and returned to Dallas. Longtime Oak Ridgers assured me that our experience was symptomatic of the way any repair work happened in Oak Ridge. Living in Oak Ridge was a delightful six months' experience so long as I overlooked the dishwashing aspects, and I always had the comfort of knowing that the duration was limited. I looked forward to returning to automated dishwashing in Dallas, and since that time I give the dishwasher an affectionate pat as I pass it. It has occasionally malfunctioned for a brief time, but I feel that I can nearly always rely on it to turn dishes into the clean state that makes them likeable.