



Floating Around ...

I have written before about the time that I worked at the music shop in Canada. In a way, that business was very similar to the printmaking venture we are building here now, in that it started up on a shoestring, gathered together a small band of enthusiasts, had a bit of a quixotic mission, and was led by a guy who had more vision than actual managerial ability.

As you might guess given that formula, both businesses have encountered plenty of ups and downs. With only limited financing available, things are always running on a shoestring and everybody is always stretched to the limit. There is not much time for anything other than work work work!

But this is Japan, and that was Canada, so the 'script' hasn't played out along exactly the same pathway. Perhaps it is because our company here is made up almost exclusively of women, while our staff back there was mostly guys, that there seems to have been much more of a propensity at the music shop to fool around a bit, and take um ... 'liberties' with the time and resources available.

Like the day we built a hovercraft on the shipping bench ...

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I remember where the idea had come from. My younger brother was living in England at the time, and I had heard that he was involved with a small company building recreational hovercraft. That kind of transportation had been invented in Britain, so the idea was in the air over there at the time, and his company was not involved in such an unusual mission as you might think.

In any case, I guess I had been chatting with some of my co-workers about his activities, and somebody - I make no claim to be the originator of the idea - suggested that we take an old vacuum cleaner that was lying around, and turn it into a small hovercraft. The motor seemed to be quite powerful, perhaps strong enough to get the thing off the ground.

Late one afternoon after knocking off work, we set to it. This cleaner was a bit of a strangely shaped appliance; the main body was a spherical shape, and this rested on a flat frame that had casters, allowing it to roll around the floor. We stripped off and tossed aside the casters - no wheels needed for a hovercraft! - covered the frame tightly with some cardboard and shipping tape, and then used a segment cut from the hose to rejig the air exhaust so that it re-directed through a hole down towards the ground.

We chopped up the rest of the hose into many small pieces, and stapled these around the edge of the platform to form the skirt of the craft. The whole process didn't take much more than an hour or so.

When we were ready for the first test, we set it on the floor, turned it on, and miracle of miracles, it worked! The thing wobbled up into the air a few millimetres, and then easily slid around this way and that as we tugged on the power cord. It kicked up a bit of dust, which we hadn't quite foreseen - perhaps we should have used the cleaner once on the floor before conducting our experiment!

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Alas, I have to report that the episode ended in tears. While we were still enjoying our fun pushing it back and forth across the shipping room floor, the owner's wife passed through on her way home for the day. If I said she 'went ballistic' that would be an exaggeration, because she never disciplined any of us directly, but it was clear she was pretty upset. We found out just why the next morning, when Bill the owner came to talk to us.

It seems that this vacuum cleaner - which to us was a piece of old discarded junk - was actually one of the first appliances that the two of them had bought back as newlyweds. Even though it had been replaced in their home by a modern model, she hadn't wanted to throw it away, but had brought it to the shop so that it could live on usefully. She was most definitely not happy to see it 'destroyed' this way.

Well, what can I say? We all know the concept that 'One man's treasure is another woman's junk', but in this case, it seems to have been the other way around!

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