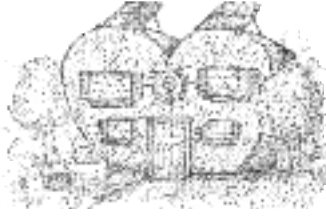


Home & Heart



Kathleen Jarschke-Schultze

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A couple of years ago, Bob-O and I bought the house and land next door at a tax auction. In our usual style, a series of coincidences happened that led to the knowledge of the auction only a week and a half before the sale.

The last tenants had moved on before the sale. We gave them over a year to come and get their stuff from the house. They eventually came back, got a few things, and split. They left us a lot of trash and two dead vehicles. Cleanup has been slow. I cleaned out the kitchen and have been using it for soapmaking. After my first attempt at soapmaking in our kitchen, when I accidentally spilled musk essential oil on the counter and could not remove the smell, Bob-O vetoed any further soapmaking activities there.

Since there is no power or water system at the other house yet, cleaning opportunities are inhibited somewhat. I need water more than I need electricity. But I also can't haul my vacuum cleaner over there to clean up the accumulated dust, dirt, and crud.

I Found It!

While in town the other day, I was cruising the local secondhand stores, exercising my lively sense of thrift. I came across a small cordless vacuum cleaner. It was a Eureka brand vacuum—The Boss Lite—a black cordless broom with no attachments. It stood 48 inches (122 cm) tall and sported a motor-driven brush roll on the business end. A small sticker on it proclaimed, "\$6. Works." This seemed to me to be ideal for my purposes. I envisioned charging it at home and using it at the other house.

The unit came with a plastic holder that attaches to the wall to hold the vacuum when not in use. When you place the vacuum in the holder, it automatically plugs the unit into a battery charger. The only way to not engage the charger is to unplug the wall cube transformer at the outlet.

When I got home, I tried out the vacuum. Its performance was anemic. I put it on the charger and left it for 24 hours. I tried it again. Same lack of suction. I figured I was out six bucks and had learned not to trust little tags that say, "Works."

Bob-O came home from a trip that had kept him away for several days. "What's that?" he queried, seeing the vacuum cleaner leaning against the wall. I told him about my deal that wasn't such a good deal. He looked it over and found a small sticker with a recycling symbol that said, "Contains nickel-cadmium batteries. Must be recycled or disposed of properly and in an environmentally safe manner. May not be disposed of in a municipal waste. For information, call 1-800-282-2886."

Bad Memory

"That's your problem," he said, "It's got NiCds. They have what is called 'memory effect.' If they are not discharged completely before recharging, the battery thinks it can only charge so much." The drawback of this model is that after taking it off the wall hanger/charger and using it for a short time, it would be replaced on the hanger/charger and the batteries would be recharged, remembering only shallow use. Voila! Built-in obsolescence—call it Dustbuster syndrome.

The owner's manual may have warned against this, but no manual was with the unit when I bought it. And from the condition of the batteries, it was apparent the previous owner had ignored any instructions about charging.

Bob-O suggested that I take the vacuum apart and give him the battery pack. I really get high enjoyment from taking things apart and assembling them. Whenever we buy anything that needs assembly, I do it. Barrister bookcases, gas barbecue, chipper/shredder, bathroom cabinets, trimmer/mower—I have assembled them all.

Zen in a Vacuum

There is something so gratifying about sitting down with instructions and tools and completing a project. I find it very relaxing and Zen. Taking things apart is almost as good. The difference is that there are no instructions, and you must remember the dismantling order and where all the bolts and screws go. Not quite as relaxing and Zen, but more adventurous.

I got regular and phillips-head screwdrivers and a cup for the screws, and began. The vacuum cleaner was like a puzzle. I wanted to dismantle the unit as little as possible, since there would be a lapse of time between taking it apart and re-assembling it. However, every removed screw led me to another, until the whole unit had to be split—from the motor-driven brush roll to the handle—just to get to the battery pack. Through



Kathleen with her secondhand, but revitalized, Boss Lite cordless vacuum. Its NiCd battery was brought back to life through several charge/discharge cycles.

diligence, I was successful. I gave Bob-O the battery pack, after marking the connections on top so I would know what color wire went where.

Bob-O took the battery pack and put it on his Maha battery charger. It can charge nearly any size and configuration of rechargeable battery larger than AAs. We also use a different Maha charger designed specifically for AA and AAA rechargeables for our small flashlights and radios. Both chargers have a feature that runs batteries through a cycle of total charge and then total discharge. Bob-O charged and discharged the vacuum cleaner's NiCd battery pack several times.

Lightweight Sucker

Two days later, he returned the battery pack to me. I reassembled the vacuum cleaner. At the end of assembly, I had two screws left over. Oh well—I did my best. The test run was flawless. The vacuum cleaner really worked! Oh, not as well as my big one, but I didn't expect that.

Our patterned rug in the living room is mostly dark shades of blue. There is a navy blue runner in front of

the wood stove. These areas really show wood chips or shoe and dog detritus. The little vacuum picks up the hair and dirt clods and wood bits very well. It's amazing how much better that room looks if those areas are vacuumed. The Boss Lite only weighs four pounds (1.8 kg). It's so easy to just grab it and spot clean the rugs. It has a plastic dirt reservoir that easily unsnaps and empties, with no replacement bags.

When the vacuum cleaner loses suction power after several uses (about 20 minutes total), I turn it on and put it in the bedroom, where I don't have to hear it, and let it run completely down. I then put it on the holder/charger. The wall cube on the charger says it draws a maximum of 6 watts, but we measured the charger unit, and it uses only 2.2 watts. I let it charge overnight, remove it from the charger, and use it when needed, keeping it off the charger until it's completely discharged. I haven't taken it to the other house yet. I like it too much to leave it over there for now.

Recycle, Reuse, Repair

If you are going to spend real money on a new cordless appliance, you should be looking for units with nickel metal hydride (NiMH) batteries. These batteries do not have the memory effect of NiCd batteries, and they are far more benign to the environment when they finally do wear out. If you choose not to buy a cordless appliance because it does not have nickel metal hydride batteries, be sure to let the manufacturer know why they didn't get your money. Consumer demand is a real change motivator—use it.

Before you discard that cordless "whatever" that uses NiCds, try the charge/discharge cycling trick. You may get your "whatever" back. Remember—recycle, reuse, repair. It feels good.

Access

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