



Slim Volume And The 16-Foot Dreadlock, or How Stupid You Need To Be To Become A Fence Contractor In Corvallis

I was part of a support team helping Suzannah Doyle get her house prepped for sale, and this weekend I volunteered to diagnose the root cause of a problem related to the downspout drains on the north and south ends of the structure. They apparently weren't working right, and hence needed fixing.

The downspouts are connected to underground pipes that are supposed to convey the rain water from the rain gutters on the house to holes punched through the curb concrete, so the runoff will be delivered straight into the street gutter and not pool up in the yard. You test these simply by climbing up a ladder and stuffing a garden hose down into the top of the downspout drain pipe, turning on the water, and watching for drainage at the curb. Neither the north nor the south curb drains were running when tested this way. Both sets of drain pipes were apparently blocked.

Each curb drain has sitting right next to it a yucca plant, and a little inspection of the pipe running underneath each yucca revealed that each pipe was plugged just inboard of the curb with a dense wad of yucca roots that had perforated the pipe and populated it with big bulbous tuber growths which are the yucca equivalent of an IRA, in which water and nutrients are stored by the plant for later withdrawal when the yucca is in a lower tax bracket. These starchy growths had completely destroyed the connector pipes that led from the edge of the sidewalk to the inside of the curb, so it was not all that surprising that neither of the curb drains was working. Digging out the yucca and cutting away the ruined pipes restored the north drain to functionality, but not the south drain.

I then ran the garden hose up the south drain from the curb and discovered that there was something very hard and unyielding way up inside the pipe about twenty feet uphill from the drain hole- something that a jet of water could not dislodge. I marked the hose at that point in its length where it would go no farther up the pipe and withdrew it. I then stretched it out and laid it down on the ground next to the pipe run with the mark coincident with the open end of the pipe and studied the zone where the blockage seemed to be.

Right smack dab where the hose had hit something hard under the ground, there was a metal fence post- part of the cyclone fence separating Suz's yard from the neighboring yard next door. I mean the post was within a half an inch of the hose tell-tale. I got out a pickaxe and went to work. Because of the arborvitae cedar trees next to the fence, I had to alternate between the pickaxe and a

huge double-bitted lumberjack axe that I used to chop my way down through all the cedar roots that were in the way. It was hard work. Damned hard.

As I dug deeper, I began turning up pieces of shattered PVC thinwall drain pipe mixed into the dirt loosened from the root mass and instead of just getting tired, I started getting mad. Supersonic jets of superheated steam began shooting out of my ears as I realized that whoever had dug the fence post hole had obviously struck the drain pipe and churned up big pieces of broken white plastic. But not only that: afterwards, he backfilled the post hole with that same dirt- dirt that was full of pieces of shattered pipe. Which meant that he knew what he had done. AND HE BURIED IT.

But wait- it gets better! I dug deeper and deeper and finally started revealing the drain pipe itself. And the concrete footing that the fence contractor had poured into the bottom of that hole to hold the metal post in place, which concrete slab occupied about eight inches of space which had once been occupied by a length of 3" PVC drain pipe. Now I ask you, saddle pals: is that cute or what? When wet, that concrete had enough time to run into both ends of the cut pipe before hardening up in there into a completely impervious plug. Which meant that whoever had poured that bucket of concrete into the bottom of that hole to a depth just sufficient to cover the cut ends of the pipe had known exactly what he was doing. AND HE BURIED IT.

And then... as noted above... he backfilled the hole after the concrete had set using the dirt that was full of pieces of broken pipe, picked up his check, and successfully sailed off into Fence Contractor Sunset, thereby furnishing you and me with a definitive and concise answer to this question: just exactly how stupid DO you need to be to become a fence contractor in Corvallis? THAT stupid. But you know what the capper to this caper is? The exclamation point stuck into the dirt at the end of the whole Stupidity Sentence and held in place there with a sack of cheap concrete? That particular fence post, and ONLY that fence post, is about one foot shorter than all its cohorts in that fence. Those posts are supposed to support the piece of pipe that runs along the top of the fence, right? But sadly, this one post cannot. Why not?

Because it is one foot too short. Not an inch too short. Not two inches too short. But ONE FOOT TOO SHORT, and this was because the fence contractor had dug that hole, and ONLY that hole, one foot too deep- just deep enough to let him cut all the way through the drain pipe buried there. Once I realized this, I started to laugh, and shake my head... Stupidity, raised to the stupidity power: Mister Fence Professional was EXPONENTIALLY STUPID, which fully qualified him to be a fence installation contractor in Corvallis! Case closed.

Roots had entered the pipe on the upstream side of the blockage, where it was always full of water from the downspout. They had grown up the pipe from the blockage into a mushy, matted mass- a root dreadlock, if you will- that was fully 16 feet long, ending where the downspout drain entered the PVC pipe at ground level. Isn't that something?

And that's Slim's story for a Tuesday afternoon, and he's sticking to it, like concrete to PVC pipe.