

My Back Porch

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My back porch, Bessie, is nestled below a great prickly juniper bush outside my old Lunceford Avenue apartment.

She was made from a simple wood frame eight feet wide by ten feet long.

She is about twenty years old and kind of rickety.

She has greeted many temporary tenants and offered shelter from bitter Idaho winters.

She knows the secrets of those that trudge upon her and wipe their feet on her mat.

She has attended many birthday parties, drunken barbecues, and bitter arguments.

I couldn't wait to make Bessie a perfectly appointed porch when I first moved in. She would be a demonstration of my good citizenship and artistry for all of the neighbors and the mailman.

Bessie looked like the deck of a war-weary battleship when I first moved in -- badly stained and peeling paint everywhere.

The corners of her paint were curling up because previous tenants were careless with selecting the right type of paint for her.

Bessie was a lot like me – a diamond in the rough and trodden upon by a cruel, insensitive world. She just needed someone to care for her properly so her inner beauty could shine through!

All Bessie really needed was to be sanded and repainted. I however, spent \$4,000 on Amazon to decorate her. That's the way I always did things – all the way, or no way at all.

It took me five weeks to position everything exactly as I wanted it. When all was said and done, Bessie looked like a cross between a Cinco de Mayo piñata and a gay pride float.

I had such high hopes for my life with Bessie. I would spend my retirement years sitting on her, smoking cigarettes and drinking strong coffee. I would gaze out into the world knowing that where I sat was the best porch in the neighborhood.

I arranged thirteen varieties of fake flowers, ivy sprigs, and palm fronds in planters all along Bessie's handrail. I installed a three-tier, trickling fountain that blissfully bubbled and gurgled.

The fake foliage dripping from the sides of the planters entirely hid me from view whenever I sat at the way-too-large patio table. I could hardly see anything from my porch now.

I'm sure that Bessie was totally embarrassed with her new decorations. The neighbors laughed at her, and they said terrible things about me. 'What a waste of money!' they would say.

I spent very little time with Bessie. I was too busy running the roads with my meth friends and spending money that I really couldn't afford to spend.

One night, a homeless acquaintance, Chuck, climbed Bessie's steps and broke into my apartment. He knocked over an expensive tea set that I had placed on the patio table.

Chuck broke all of my furnishings and electronics with a baseball bat. He poured syrup in all of my electrical outlets and all over my computing equipment. He took two-liter Pepsi bottles and sprayed all of the walls with a thick, gooey molasses blanket.

I arrived home dissatisfied from the emergency care facility with mere over-the-counter medications that I could have purchased on my own at Walgreens for hundreds of dollars less.

I confronted Chuck as he sat on Bessie's handrail wielding an ax from my shed.

With a 105-degree temperature, I lunged at him, knocking him off Bessie's banister and into the scratchy juniper bush.

When the police arrived, the neighbors had come out to enjoy the free excitement.

My landlady threatened to evict me, and I broke my lease to stop the financial bleeding.

I bet it will be difficult to ever rent anything in my own name again.

My cats, Arbutumus and Arbuckle, used to lounge on Bessie with their tails languidly painting dreamy patterns in the cool air.

Once I started using meth, the cats ignored me when I called them. They stayed out on the porch through the cold winter.

I hope my fur babies have a good life. Of course, I wouldn't know. When you're in prison, you're not allowed to go check on your cats.

I know that the landlady took the cats in. She called me right before sentencing and told me that I was an awful, vile human being.

My life with Bessie was just like every home improvement project I have ever undertaken.

My hope was always to make things better and to make mom proud.

The result was never as expected. I'd over-spend, pick petty fights with the neighbors, and end up feeling I was a failure.

When I get out of prison, I want things in my life that excite me. I wonder how I can smooth out my rough edges and learn to do just the right amount of anything.

My new Bessie in my new life will be a launching pad for epic adventures rather than a final resting place.