

## Dishes about art, not drying

“Do you want me to help you?” she asked.

It was more of a request than a question.

“No. It’s okay.”

“Are you sure?”

“Yeah. It’s not really a two-man gig.”

I was washing the dishes for the first time since Eli left for Kelowna ... about three weeks ago. That’s the way it goes when the boy is gone. Things fall apart. If I don’t have him to take care of, then I generally wing it, eating mostly take out or canned food. It isn’t pretty. One pot, that’s all I keep washing, over and over again. Thank God, he’ll be back next week.

Anyway, the reason I’m doing dishes now is because I have a female friend visiting. If it was a guy, we might both be eating off the coffee table as we watched the Jays lose but a woman, no matter how much of a pal, compels me to clean up – especially after she cleaned the bathtub for me the other day.

“Was it that dirty?” I asked, genuinely feeling it was clean because, just a month ago, my sister had cleaned it while babysitting.

“No,” she said, laughing to ease my embarrassment, “I just wanted to take a bath.”

Huh, I thought.

So, naturally, when I got home Wednesday, I had to do the dishes.

“Oh, I know a lot of people who do the dishes together,” she said, threateningly picking up a dish towel, then adding: “It’s mostly women, though.”

“Yeah,” I nod, “It’s kind of a social thing.”

“Yeah. They chat.”

I slide over slightly, blocking her from the sink area, just in case she didn’t get it the first time.

I always do the glasses first, to give the dish rack balance for when I stand the plates up. When I get that first glass done – tall ones first – I notice she is still lurking menacingly behind me, her sweet smile disguising her evil intent. I have to make this clear without being rude, so I very deliberately put the glass in the corner of the rack farthest away from her and that blasted towel.

There’s a moment there when it seemed like she swayed forward slightly, perhaps intending to dry the glass, but she backs off and goes to the living room, preferring yoga to whatever consequences might follow her infringing on my dish space.

And it is MY dish space.

I don’t like doing dishes but when I do, it’s solo. Always. And let them sit there and dry, that’s the way to go.

But it’s not just the air-dry thing that I find appealing, that’s the least of it. It’s the stacking. It’s the only way to enjoy it, to get some kind of satisfaction out of it.

My ex-wife used to get mad at me for not doing the dishes immediately. She would ask me to do them and, if they weren’t done 10 minutes later, she would angrily start doing them herself. She didn’t understand that I was ... how do you say ... a virtuoso of dish washing.

I like to stack dishes. That’s why I wait for the big load, the whole kit ’n kaboodle. I relish the challenge of fitting everything into that rack.

“Wow,” a friend commented one time, looking over my work with unveiled envy. “You like to stack too. It’s very good.”

It has to look good. There has to be a quality to it. Any fool can randomly pile dishes into a rack but it takes a true artist to make it fit in a manner that was meant to be, that is practical yet aesthetically pleasing. So that when, say, an alien race comes along and sees the stack of dishes, they know that intelligent life lives here, because there is the presence of design.

And the true artist will never undo it to make room. That is the real challenge, the real quality of it; you must anticipate upcoming dishes, like a chess master who is several moves ahead of his opponent. You must somehow make that particular stack work; each one is different, each one is unique.

While I do the dishes, I can hear her bumping around in the living room, doing her yoga. I find a peace in that: both of us, friends, artists, performing physical poetry, together yet in solitude. It wasn’t until a moment or two later that I noticed the tear quivering on my cheek.