



Karen Anderson

I have a heck of a tool collection. Just don't ask me what any of them are.

Having a good set of tools is one of the keys to being a successful homeowner. However, as Club Columnist

Karen Anderson has discovered, such a resource is rendered useless if you don't know what the tools do.

They say that when you have a hammer, every problem looks like a nail. But when your tool collection is made up of intriguingly shaped metal whatchamacallits, problems just look ... insoluble.

I was reflecting on this the other day while our friend Ray the Engineer was helping me install a Little Free Library in our front garden. We were re-purposing some old, pressure-treated four-by-fours that still had nails in them.

Ray was wielding a claw hammer in an unsuccessful attempt to wrestle a nail from the wood. Loud grunting and lots of sweating did not seem to be helping.

"Got Vise-Grips?" he finally asked, tossing the claw hammer onto the lawn.

In my brain, the words "Vise-Grips" translated into a heavy-duty variation on a pair of kitchen tongs.

I went into the garage and returned with some likely items. Ray looked at me sadly and shook his head.

"Those are pliers," he said patiently. "That's a wrench. And that's a plumber's wrench."

Ray said he'd drive back to his workshop for the proper tools. He was planning to stop for a snack on the way. I had the vision of our afternoon project stretching into the evening. Or into next weekend. Or into next summer.

"Wait. Don't give up!" I said. I took a deep breath. "Come into ... the garage."

Considering the state of our garage, that's not an invitation I issue lightly. But Ray's a close friend.

"Boy howdy," Ray exclaimed (he's from Texas). His eyes widened at the sight of the several pegboards on which I had neatly arrayed my tools, my ex-husband's tools, my late father's tools, a few of the Scholarly Gentleman's book-binding and mat-cutting tools, and some tools that contrac-

tors have left at my house over the years. Let's just say I will never be at loss for a screwdriver of any length.

Ray quickly spotted the Vise-Grips (also known as locking pliers or a Mole wrench – I hadn't been that far off). As it turned out, I had three identical pairs of them.

Ray grabbed a pair. He locked the grips onto the head of a three-inch bent nail and whipped it out of the four-by-four as easily if he were plucking a chip from a bowl of onion dip.

When Ray was done, I respectfully replaced the grips on the pegboard, mentally affixing the label "excellent for torture" beneath them.

Tools and shop equipment just seem to follow me home where, I admit, I invite them in even if I don't know what they're capable of doing. Like that big thing I saw sitting on a table at a recent yard sale.

"A bench grinder," the eager seller told me. "In great condition."

"Do you have a bench to grind?" teased the Scholarly Gentleman as he tugged me away from the table. (We were early for a wedding in the neighborhood, and what better way to kill time in semi-formal dress than a good yard sale?)

I turned back, and the apparently desperate seller made an irresistible pitch.

"Five dollars," he said. "For a bench grinder!"

"I'll take it."

With only the subtlest rolling of his eyes, the Scholarly Gentleman carried our new bench grinder out to our car.

"I know I'll find a use for it," I assured him as we drove on to the wedding.

We arrived in plenty of time to get good seats in a pew up front. To my astonishment, the dashing handsome gentleman in the pinstripe suit sitting next to me turned out to be Ray the Engineer. (The fellow cleans up well.) I told him about our yard sale find.

"Boy howdy," he exclaimed. "Do I ever need a bench grinder!"

The Scholarly Gentleman and I exchanged glances.

"Give me your car keys," he said to Ray.

By the time the bride floated down the aisle, a vision in white, my bench grinder had a new home in Ray's trunk. It was truly a match made in heaven.

