

STUDIO MOVES (or WHAT WAS I THINKING??)

I moved my studio 3 times in 14 months.

I dis-assembled and put back together the draw bench, the rolling mills, the bench cutter, 4 benches, hammers, files, draw plates, the metal, the wood, everything else in between; took apart and rebuilt wooden platforms for the heavier equipment that could not be bolted to the floor....

Have not worked much these past 14 months.

Been busy keeping it all together, the studio, the tools...relocating.

I had only moved my studio twice in the last 15 years.

The previous work space had been painstakingly carved out of a garage and basement of a rental house, and refined over 7 years with recycled scrap wood.

I contemplated grandiose plans of painting it all white one day, with dashes of splashed red in the corners.

Later I had a wood stove put in, it was beginning to feel real.

But change was coming.

It all happened in a frenzy, somewhat in slow motion at the beginning of summer;

I tried to be as 'ready' as I could: most everything was put in boxes, even labeled with numbers and matching an accompanying list!

Looking for studio space, finding studio space where I could 'seamlessly' continue my work, at the very least not disrupt it too much.

So I wishfully thought.

Moving a studio is not just moving a studio.

I had 45 days.

50 Foot Extension Cord

The first place I picked was a little adobe house with a detached adobe studio on 75 acres of land, just what i had always wanted!

To be out of town again, this was 45 miles from the city, the last three down a rocky and steep dirt road that eventually lead to the river.

Or nowhere, depending whom you asked.

I got hooked on the detached studio, it was perfect for everything.

Someone had even worked in there as a goldsmith one time, so said the owner.

The owner seemed like an ok older guy, he had built everything himself over the years and preferred 'artists' on his property...

This should have raised a flag, but I glossed over it.

The overall condition of the property was rough but solid in its mud bricks.

A bathtub stood in one of the bedrooms, funky but functioning; the shower was a sliver in the wall on another side of the house, a washing machine tucked away across the shower and the cooking gas stove was in an odd location... but heck, the studio was in very good conditions and it was calling me. I didn't care about the rest.

We signed lease and papers, I moved in.

It took a few days to take all my stuff there, including trips with a uhaul truck that was having a hard time keeping up with my jeep and a fearless red toyota truck; I was filled with anticipation for the new studio, wanted to unpack everything and get to work as soon as possible.

It was 10 days into August.

It had been a full month of chaos, my work was coming out in a catalog early September, orders were going to come in, I had to be ready for the action.

I like candle light.

I use very little electricity for my lighting needs, except in the studio.

I had flipped on all the switches, checked the refrigerator, plugged in my computer, all was working fine.

The first few days went by unnoticed, all I would do after the daily driving, tossing boxes on and off trucks, was feed the dogs and crash on the floor of my bedroom-to-be.

But on the fourth day whatever electricity there was started acting funny.

The refrigerator stopped working, lights dimmed and my toaster oven jumped the breakers, overloading the circuit.

The landlord, who lived just around the bend, was alerted and showed up minutes later with an old wrench in his hand, like it was going to fix everything.

The repair expedition went on the whole day, with a break for lunch (on his part), by night the lights were still dim, the refrigerator and toaster oven could still not be used... I clearly had an electricity problem.

By night the landlord handed me a 50 foot heavy duty extension cord and said he was going to hook me up directly from the box down the road, in the meantime. The situation was hitting rough spots but I trusted things would be better in the morning. They often are.

I spent the night in a haze, doubt and a lot of candle light, soothing the disappointment I felt in being delayed in my studio set up.

The next day the landlord announced he had checked a few things and had decided the whole electrical wiring had to be redone, so could I please hang on to that extension cord for my power needs, in the meantime.

It ran through two rooms, under three doors and into the dirt outside, passed an old trailer for 'guests', passed an old barn and finally into an electric box lodged into a two 2x4 frame and held in place with barbed wire.

Sure, I could run my studio on a 50 foot long extension cord.

I held on to that cord for 2 weeks, and then 3. And then 4.

The owner was digging ditches in the ground during the day, oblivious to my nervous complaints about not being able to work.

By the end of 3rd week the first orders from the catalog were happening, had still inventory, so I began running the 'office' from the bathtub room, printing labels and packaging earrings for shipping.

I did not unpack the studio.

The only respite from the discomfort were the daily walks with the dogs, up the mesa over big boulders, looking at the situation from a distance.

Why was this all happening?

By the 4th week and no improvement besides the extension cord, interactions with the landlord were difficult; he was obstinately refusing outside help, consolidating my suspicion he had something to hide and exhausting my patience.

He demanded rent for September one day during his lunch break from digging.

I offered to pay reduced rent until matters were resolved.

He did not agree, there was no room for debate.

The next day I told him I was leaving, I would be out by the first of the month, just 3 days away.

He pinned a 3 day-notice-to-vacate to the door in response.

I had to suddenly hire an attorney and deal with the landlord crazies but most importantly I had to find studio space. I had 3 days.

The School House

At 11 pm that night I emailed out in distress.

There was a place for rent across the river, had seen it in my searches weeks earlier.

It was a 1500 sqft old school house, a big open space with kitchen, laundry room, little pantry and bathroom with bathtub.

It had high ceilings and big windows to the west..

But it was so close to the road.

Not much traffic, but still a state road, the school house had no fence, I was concerned for the dogs chasing an occasional rabbit across it... I had passed it by.

The detached studio on the hill on the other side had enchanted me.

In the middle of that night an email went out with a question: was it still available?

At 5 minutes past midnight the answer popped back on my laptop screen: YES! it read.

I had the keys in my hand the next day; 45 miles out of town, just on the other side of the river, it was PERFECT for a studio!

Not even a month into the first move and it was happening again.

I was beginning to feel the stress of 30 action-packed days and the burden of costly dealings in landlord-tenant disputes from the first relocation, I felt relieved about the school house.

I left the no-electricity place in about 76 hours, the red fearless truck and my red jeep returned to the scene (no UHaul this time) and they climbed the road and the rocky slope and took my studio to the school house across the river.

Early September, my second place.

The weather was rapidly turning into fall and then winter, there was a mama bear wood stove in the school house. Everything was working properly, mice droppings in quite a few places... I could deal with that later.

I had to set up my studio first.

I rebuilt wooden platforms, put back together draw bench, rolling mills, bench cutter, the 4 benches, hammers, files, draw plates, metal of all sorts, wood, everything else in between.

But the mice population was growing, despite my initial patching up holes and cracks; I kept it under control with a catch&release trap strategically placed behind the cooking stove. Somewhere from there they came in, but the stove was old, beautiful and heavy, no way to move it to peek behind it.

The occasional catch per week quickly escalated to a nightly occurrence and I began losing sleep over the frequent 'clank' of the metal trap echoing throughout the 1500 sqft space at night.

I caught 33 mice my first 45 days there.

Not much could be done, except stuff the remaining cracks with steel wool; it took hours away from the studio for days on end, and a lot of steel wool.

The next 4 months went by adjusting to the new place, dealing with mice problems, putting up a fence around the house for the dogs, and catching up with a lot of record keeping. It took a while to settle in the school house.

Spring was slow in coming, by felt I was almost back on track.

Maybe this situation could work for a couple of years, I thought..

Then early summer came.

And soon I had snakes coming up through the floor.

Not rattles, not big ones, but still.

I stepped on one once not seeing it, 2 more I caught crawling about in the middle of the studio floor, coming from who knows where.

THIS was beginning to weigh on me, I began to scan the floor before walking anywhere.

Then the centipedes started showing up.

The centipedes pushed it all to the limit for me during the following months, just too many encounters.

The first one was a 'baby' one, 3 inches long, fell on me one night while I was asleep... The last one was 8 inches long and 2 inches wide and sneaked inside the school house early one Sunday morning, too fast for me to catch.

It freaked me out, I just did not want to have it in the house.

Spent hours trying to find it, moving things around, my move-in-between-move, more time and energy away from the bench, where I really longed to be.

At 2:35 am that night, I caught it.

It came out of nowhere, I looked down from my perched position at the kitchen table... and there it was. Had been waiting, had my bucket ready this time.

Other things contributed and triggered the renewed moving fever, but mostly the centipede did it.

I moved again.

Now this third one, here in a 400 sqft casita, bursting at the seams with everything I own... Open land out the window to the south.

At last, got pretty much everything in.

Except my stakes.

It dawned on me the other day that I haven't seen my stakes these past few months.

When was it the last time, really?

Raining again, been raining all night, rest of my stuff still outside in bins and ill-covered containers, taking it all in.

I cannot think about it, there is nothing i can do.

I am exhausted.

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