

“If You Build It, She Will Bake!”

(if you don't, your sweet tooth will suffer!)

Jim learned an important new lesson following our move to Nebraska. If the following conditions occur:

- Wife enjoys cooking and baking
- Wife decrees that new abode's kitchen is too small
- Wife notes that she will not be baking until new kitchen is installed.

Run, don't walk, to your local home center or contractor, and draw up those plans. Man cannot live long without chocolate chip cookies, pie, cake, and snickerdoodles.

Seriously, Julie did bake a few things, but the old kitchen just wasn't up to the job. In fact, the previous owner specifically designed the kitchen to be small and almost unusable. Her reason: She didn't like cooking. To each her own, I suppose. In any case, new cabinetry arrived December 31, 1996, and I tore out the old cabs (that's the “cool” name for cabinets. Evidently, every trade has its lingo) on New Year's Day. Julie's new kitchen sports a breakfast bar, two “lazy susans”, 42” wall units, peninsula “uppers” and “lowers” (more lingo terms) that open from both sides, a 36” wide floor to ceiling pantry cab, a ceiling fan light, and an oak floor. It's a Julie Brain inspired original. My favorite creation is the under sink garbage bag chute. Yes, you heard right. In another “Jim is lazy” episode, I cut and trimmed in a hole in the sink base, which opens up into the garage and a trash can. To “take out the trash”, simply open the trap door, drop bag into chute, and you are done. Julie loves it. For once in her life, the trash is taken out on time. For those who know Julie (those who don't, listen up), you'll love this tidbit. We bought the cabinets from Menards, after using their computer planner to design the kitchen. Julie was determined to construct the best kitchen possible from the “lego-like” pieces in the Schrock cabinet book (which she received from Menards). She pored over that catalog, to the point where she knew every cabinet in it. We went to the store to work on the design some more:

Julie: I'd like to put a 24” x 42” triangular corner cabinet there by the sink.

Sales: Schrock doesn't sell those.

J: I am sure they do. They were in the catalog I have.

S: You must have an old catalog. (Who gave it to us?)



J: It says 1997-1998.

S: It couldn't. (really bad move!)

(At this point, she was shooting glares over at me and trying to gently wrestle the store catalog from the salesperson. For my part, I was seeking shelter in case of explosion)

J: Well, can you ask Schrock if they still have any? (very tactful move, as you'll see)

S: I'll ask my manager if he knows about the corner cabs.

(Salesperson leaves, Julie grabs book, flips to correct page, places finger on correct item, and gives ME that look. I didn't even do anything. Life is so unfair.)

S (returns with manager): This lady is looking for...

J (pointing to item in book): This cabinet right here.

I wonder if the salesperson still has a job. I am just glad women's looks really don't kill. If they did, all Menards employees would have been deceased.

Moral: Don't argue with Julie unless you are 110% sure you are correct. Make that 200% if you are her husband.

Least I give you the wrong impression, the salesperson had it coming. He almost got belted by both of us in the course of that evening.

The kitchen is still not quite done (trim and toekicks still linger undone), but it is functional. Once again, Jim is treated to baked goods. All is well in Brainville. (Well, it is for me ☺)

Luckily, 1997 was a much slower year than 1996 (See **Moo-ving...**) My new job is much more fulfilling, and we've both slowed down quite a bit. We resisted the urge to get involved in everything that floats our way. In fact, we were “pew potatoes” at church for a few months, although we've finished that. It's just nice to attend a service every so often and not be responsible for it. Unlike last year, when we almost didn't unpack the TV, we've been watching **M*A*S*H** reruns periodically at night, and popping in **Perry Mason** tapes on the weekends.

The basement (otherwise known as “We'll put **YOUR** parents down there when we finish it”) construction is progressing smoothly. As of this writing, the bedroom is livable (no carpeting



yet, but we don't want people getting too comfy...), the bathroom is done (well, some folks might insist on a door ☺), and the "lived-in" room is coming along. Julie is getting more used to my "frenzy modes", where I try to accomplish 5 weeks of work in 5 days. She claims she can bear them, providing I have them only periodically. Dad helped drywall in August (OK, someone kept Pla-Do™ from the man when he was growing up. Who's the culprit? He went through 10 gallons in record time. If I didn't know he enjoyed Julie's cooking, I'd bet he ate the stuff.) In November, Neil came and did doors and closets (If you see him, ask him just how small the bathroom closet really is ☺) However, we should celebrate, for there is a clear winner in the "I measured, and the resulting cut board wasn't too short" contest. Contenders: Jim, John Brain, Neil Andrews, Verne Huffman. Drum roll. Winner is: (rips open envelope and blow into it) **Verne**. There's some debate on whether he actually cut a board, but he still wins. Top reason miscuts don't matter: blueprints? What blueprints? Anything can be changed.

Vacation time saw us in South Dakota. Noteworthy stops included Mount Rushmore, The Badlands, Wall Drug (how many miles is it from your house?), The Music Museum in Vermillion, The Jesse James Jump Bridge at Devil's Gulch in Garretson, and the location for Dances with Wolves, in Pierre (It's pronounced "pier", just so you don't make the mistake we did). We both enjoyed the many waterfalls in Spearfish Canyon and the night lighting of Mt. Rushmore. I enjoyed the Museum of Science, Wildlife, and Industry in Webster, and the Corn Palace in Mitchell (They create murals out of corn on the civic center. Julie wasn't as impressed) Julie's faves included feeding the burros in Custer State Park, and the Prairie Dogs. (She adores those overweight little squeakers) The biggest hurdle in SD was the water. The big rains that put Grand Forks, ND in the headlines doused SD as well. We had trouble getting across the state due to many roads being underwater. Some we traveled over were mere inches above the water. After the third aborted attempt to go West from Webster, we were seriously thinking of renting a boat.

We bought another truck this year. Longtime readers can relax, as it cost more than the \$275.00 we bought the last one for. We finally decided that using the Saturn to haul 16 2X4 studs, as refreshing as it is to know your subcompact can do such a thing, was not helping our poor car any. So, we picked up a 1991 S10 Extended Cab V6 4X4 Tahoe Z71. (And they wonder why people have trouble remembering auto designations!) Our truck has two "bills". One we paid, and one that hangs over the top of the windshield from the roof. It's useful and makes it easy to spot our truck at functions. "It's over thar, the funny looking one with the cap on top."

With our new auto, we promptly took a quick vacation to a friend's ranch in Valentine, NE. On the ranch, "lane" is a loosely used term. 4 wheel drive ended up being a **VERY** wise investment. We took the dogs, and all had fun. Sherlock and Watson loved being off leash, we loved the quiet, and the sandburrs (take a wild guess) loved us. Poor Watson's hair and low clearance acted like a magnet for them. Still, he just ate them off and trotted on. Fish and deer were plentiful at the ranch, unlike humans. We walked for hours, both on the ranch, and off. Union Pacific has loaned miles of rail bed to Nebraska to make walking/riding trails. In Valentine, you can walk or ride over a quarter mile long trestle straddling the

Niobrara River. Burrs aside, Valentine was fun.



The homestead received a bit of improvement this year. Gone is the dog run and the rotting dog houses on the side yard, having been replaced by grass seed. **Quick note here:** Do **NOT** over-fertilize to guarantee that your grass will grow. Doubling up the fertilizer translates into some easy algebra. Regular fertilizing nets one yard mow a week. You do the math. I wore out blades on that crazy patch. I purposely under watered it, hoping some of it would die. I will **NEVER** do this again. I hate to mow! As well, the front flowerbeds by the house saw proper treatment this Fall. They are now populated with 100's of bulbs and seeds, which will have to grow, because Julie and I are done planting. **Period.** No offense, but there's a distinct reason we don't farm.

We posed for some pictures with the dogs this Christmas, which I scanned in for the letter. Sherlock (the Sheltie) is 4, Watson (the Pomeranian) is 3, I am 26, (I think), and one never reveals the age of a woman (I am learning). All are doing well, although we just had a bout with the flu. If you ever visit the house, note that Watson isn't called the "Love Sponge" for nothing. Julie loves her new kitchen and being able to stay home and enjoy herself. She's been creating handmade Christmas gifts, so you might be receiving one. She's also been practicing piano, baking (Yes!) and reading her books. For my part, I've received a promotion at work and now supervise a small Intranet group. At home, I make sure the kitchen doesn't go to waste, work on the basement, and play with my computers. Speaking of PCs, we now have 5 in the house, all networked. Julie has one, I have one, the kitchen has one (the TV is the monitor), one's a server, and I have a cute "World's smallest IBM" for on the road. It's the size of a VCR tape, and 1.2 lbs. It's color, but the keyboard's a bit tight to touch typing. The Commodore computers are **NOT** included in that total.

JBRAIN.COM is still up, although now it's on a commercial server in Maryland. 50,000 people visit every month, and we don't sell anything. You figure it out.

Well, I'd better wrap this up and get this in the mail. As it is, it'll probably arrive after Christmas. It's my fault! That's what happens when you leave a man in charge of Christmas cards. We still miss the special friends, the Michigan bunch, and our family, but we are happy we've found some new faces and friends in Omaha. Come by and see us sometime, and remember: The food is free but **EVERYONE** gets to work on the basement!

Merry Christmas and Happy New Year,



The Brains (Jim, Julie, Sherlock, and Watson)