

Little things

It's usually the little things that make the biggest difference in our lives. As a young brick mason I remember seeing a little brick hammer in a supply store; I'd never seen one before and I liked the way it looked, so I bought it on impulse. That was my lucky day. It turned out to be the best brick tool I ever owned. I used it a lot. So much in fact, that when the handle split I went looking for another; but there were none to be found, nor another hammer like it, so I glued and re-glued the handle, and finally shortened it, bound it with nylon cord, and sealed it with epoxy. It looked funny, but it still worked fine.

Before brick saws became fashionable we cut all our bricks manually. Using my large hammer and a brick-set (a chisel-like tool used for cutting brick) I would sometimes shatter four of the brittle Golden Buff bricks before I could get a decent cut. That is where my little brick hammer saved the day, for when I used the little brick hammer instead of the brick-set I seldom destroyed a brick. I don't know why it worked; but I loved it, because when I laid windowsills every brick had to be shortened, and my little brick hammer made all that cutting a lot easier to do.

Flue tile are brittle, too, and they are difficult to cut. As a rule, we used the traditional method to cut them. Filling the flue tile with sand and then carefully chiseling a groove horizontally along a line with a hammer and chisel until the flue broke apart worked well, usually, but it was time consuming, and some tile were so brittle that they broke vertically and were useless. It was on just such a day that my little brick hammer found its way to glory.

I had had just finished laying my last brick on the Olympus High School. It was our final day on the job, and I was busy cleaning my trowel when I saw the superintendent of the brick job walking directly toward me carrying a large flue tile in his arms. I knew him by sight, but because he had never spoken to me before, I was surprised when he said: "Bob, I've got a problem that I think you can help me with. Do you see this flue tile? I need it cut to size. Now don't get anxious, but I've been trying to make the cut myself, and have just shattered four flue tiles trying. So I've given up. To make it worse, this is the only flue tile left in the state of Utah, right now, because of a labor strike. Can you make the cut for me?"

Word of the dilemma quickly spread, and a small crowd of brick masons soon gathered around, most of them much older and more experienced than I was. I thought perhaps they came to watch the rookie

make a fool of himself. I wondered why the boss had singled me out from the rest of the crew; but I couldn't very well refuse, and so I looked at the flue tile, then back at the boss, then back at the flue tile a few times as anxious sweat began to dampen my brow. "Well . . . he couldn't make the cut using sand," I thought, "so I guess I'll do it my way".

I took a deep breath to settle my anxiety, grabbed my little hammer, and suddenly, with a burst of energy, I began to whack the top of that empty flue tile with a vengeance, vigorously pummeling it like a man possessed; whacking small chunks off the top with each stroke and working downward with swift, sharp blows. Chips were flying everywhere, causing the crowd to draw back, and eliciting a concerned gasp from the lips of my boss. But amidst all the chaos it took only a few minutes for my little hammer to do its work, and before long I handed my boss a perfect cut; much to his surprise and relief.

Like little hammers, it's the little things we do in life that make all the difference. It may be such a small thing as a warm smile, a gentle hug, a brief note of appreciation, a single rose plucked off the bush for the one you love, a word of helpful praise, a pat on the arm, a hug. These, and a thousand other kindnesses, make the world go around—and happily so—they make life worth living. And over my 80 years I've found that when we take care of the little things, the big things generally have a way of taking care of themselves.