

# Roy Meachum

10/14/87

## Clouds of dust



Ever try drinking grapefruit juice sprinkled with dust?

The old farmhouse suffers under clouds of old plaster, sprayed out into the air and permeating everything. The word processor is covered with a fine mist, and the usual series of pipes tastes gritty on my teeth.

But there is progress on rehabilitating Sharon's dream house — let the record show.

John Foreman and his helper arrived this morning shortly after the crack of dawn, driving my wife and the two dogs into early shelter into what will be the dining room. I grabbed my juice glass and the first batch of daily newspapers and trudged upstairs to the office.

Master plasterer Foreman is in the process of refurbishing the 1864 hallway. Some cracks had opened too wide to permit a simple re-touch. That was a given, from the start. But nothing provided preparation for the billowing dust.

However, let's face it, folks, in many areas I am no fast-learner. My former *Washington Post* colleague Shirley Povich told me straight out: "You're a slow bloomer, Roy," he said, and, by way of consolation, "Never mind, so was I."

I doubt that Shirley, despite his confession, had my capacity for so quickly "unlearning" unpleasant experiences.

You see, only three days before Mr. Foreman showed up, I ripped down a wall of 19th century plaster, laths and all. My reward was a pile of old square nails.

When Sharon returned home from her *Lady on Skates* that day, she took one look at my blackened bald head and face streaked with dirt and broke into instant laughter. My beard was matted with the grime.

So I should have been ready for today's mess, at least in my mind.

But the confusion may have arisen from the quick dispatch and tidy professionalism that attended the new fence. Tom Ritter's two-man crew accomplished their magic with minimum damage to the lawn.

Now we have to wait over the winter for the pickets and posts to weather before the painting gets under way. I have visions of Sharon playing Tom Sawyer next spring and swapping off brush time for people's "goodies" — preferably antiques.

At any rate, while no comparison in the two projects is really possible, one out-of-doors and the other cooped up in the core of the house, I continue to

fumble with some way of understanding my total incapability to anticipate the disorder, inevitable with renovation.

My principal comfort comes with the knowledge that many other families in Frederick County have gone through the process, with many more to follow.

In the sense of sharing the experience, I should relate that the Meachums continue to suffer from lost expectations, sometimes they work out for the better.

The same day plasterer Foreman showed up, two other workmen had promised to tackle other rooms.

My friend Harold Green telephoned regrets: He displaced his back last week. The other man simply failed to appear. Had either shown, he would have had a time getting around the scaffolding, which presently crowds the entire front entrance. See what I mean?

The clouds of dust are annoying, nothing more. Indeed, they are welcome. With Shawn's wedding three weeks off, her mother now has one less crisis to worry over. When the invited guests show up, the hallway should be ready. Well, maybe.

**GREMLINS:** From time to time, glitches pop up in these columns. Some are my own mistakes. But others result from simply too many well-meaning hands that tinker with the copy.

On Monday, there appeared a gaffe, so off-base as to be destructive to that column and to the community's best interest.

Frederick County schools began an AIDS course this fall in the first year of middle school, at the seventh-grade level. That is what I wrote, but not what found its way into the *Frederick Post*. The error was corrected in the afternoon *News*.

Anyway, I regret any misinformation which creeps into this space, from whatever source. Let's put the blame on gremlins, and hope for better days.

**CITY SWEEPER:** Morning rush hour drivers along the Golden Mile last week were startled to see a Frederick city sweeper, busy cleaning up the 7-Eleven parking lot. One reader telephoned his indignation.

It turns out the city was only undoing a mess created by one of its trucks, which broke a hose and sprayed hydraulic fluid several days before.

Public Works Director Bob Strine explained the sweeper was removing sand that had been put down to absorb the fluid. Nothing more complicated than that.

I appreciated the reader's call, and Bob welcomed the chance to set the record straight for anybody else who wondered.