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Handwritten shorthand symbols on a blue-lined background.

فيلد، ص. ١٠٠، ص. ١٠٠

ص. ١٠٠، ص. ١٠٠، ص. ١٠٠

Handwritten shorthand symbols on a blue-lined background.

Get On With It

The more I looked at the task ahead, the more daunting it appeared. I had made my decision, admittedly in the comfort of a warm room with the plans on the paper pad in front of me. It all seemed like a good idea at the time, and, despite the impending effort needed, I was still of the opinion that undertaking this project would make a huge improvement. I had wanted to embark on it for some time and had already incurred expenses in the materials needed. There was no going back now. But I had become used to planning and replanning, so that I would get the best result. As the saying goes, if you fail to plan, you are planning to fail, but after a while real action cannot be put off any longer.

I positioned myself immediately in front of the laborious task and told myself, "If you don't do it, it's not going to get done. It won't happen by itself, it's as simple as that. You want the results, you have to do the work. If you start now, then it will be finished all the more quickly. The summer weather will be here before long, and you will have all this out of the way before those lazy hazy hot days arrive. You'll be sorry if you don't and glad if you do." I replied to myself, "OK, that's it, mind made up, let's get on with it."

And so the job was attacked, not a shorthand book or something else educational, but digging up the garden path in order to reshape and repair it. The idea was to make it all flat, going where it should go, with no muddy cracks and weeds, and no puddles collecting in odd corners. With help from the family and an assortment of destructive but useful tools, sledge-hammer, big mallet, giant chisel, crowbar and safety goggles, the old paving came up, some of it without much fuss and some of it with

great resistance. We soon learned to take advantage of existing joins and cracks to make splitting it up much easier. The good bits of paving were saved for reuse and the smashed fragments put aside for the new foundations.

The altered route was dug out of the lawn, lined with the rubble and hammered down with the sledge hammer. Then a dry concrete mix was thrown down and watered in with the hose, on the light spray setting. A bit of poking with a bamboo stick ensured that the mix went down all the holes. Each stage was completed and satisfaction gained from mentally ticking it off the progress list. We ended each day by congratulating ourselves with, "That was a good day's work, all ready for the next bit tomorrow." Never was a hot shower so welcome and so necessary, and the day's dusty labour ended with a fragrant and restful evening, plenty of restorative hand cream, and an earlier than usual bedtime.

With perseverance the job was completed in four days, with only the surrounding garden tidying jobs remaining, grass relaying and plant moving, what I call the "good bits". I spent most of the time looking forward to the end result, as I did not really enjoy humping lumps of concrete around, although placing the crazy paving was quite fun. It was a giant version of a jigsaw puzzle, but without the guarantee that all the pieces will fit or even exist. Pieces fitting together was a minor problem, but getting it all flat, with a slight slope to allow the rain to run off, was more important. As I was removing the broken old path laid long ago, I wondered what someone in the future would make of my handiwork when it was old, cracked and needed replacing.

Get On With It

I kept an "archaeology" basket nearby for the things that I found during the digging. These included a large chunk of cow bone, probably from when this area was farmland less than a hundred years ago; lots of rusty nails and other rusted metal objects; brown pottery, some old and glazed, but the cleaner pieces clearly from flower pots; pieces of white crockery, some with curves, ridges, fluted decoration or scalloped edges, some with blue patterns and one from a "best set" teacup with transfer print and gold stripe; a small yellowed fragment of a plastic doily with a tiny blue chequered pattern in imitation of crochet; an intriguing piece of greenish chain link, but not enough of it to be able to guess its purpose; foil milk bottle tops in red and orange.

There were lots of pieces of glass. The flat shards were obviously from old windows. The curved and rounded pieces may have been from thick bowls or bottles and thin delicate drinking glasses; two chunky bottle necks; two pieces of obscured glass, one stripy from a cabinet door and one in a blob pattern that was commonly used for front doors; fragments of coal from the days when this house had open fires and the cinders thrown out or maybe the coal stored in the garden; a two pence coin dated 1971 and a halfpenny coin dated 1976; two green marbles, one with a twist and one streaky. Lastly, while relaying some turf,

I found a very tiny grey plastic toy seal with a ball balanced on its nose. The only thing I did not enjoy finding was a seemingly endless supply of purple shaggy carpet tufts, each well attached to its lump of dry clay, which I thought I had cleared and got rid of when we moved in thirty years ago. Obviously some bits had become dug in and remained under the grass waiting to be rediscovered.

The work is now all done and will probably retain its pristine appearance and novelty for some months, although the remainder of the garden paths I am conveniently describing as "rustic and laid back"! By the end of the year, the newer paving slabs will have become grubbier, the joins in the turf will have disappeared, and all we will have is photos to remind us of the piles of rubble, the mess and the gradual progress of the work. It is so easy to procrastinate on doing certain jobs, but I find that once I have started, the prospect of soon enjoying the results is enough to keep the activity and interest going. I prefer to be able to say, "This time next week it will all be over and done with" or "Past the halfway point now". These are my regular self-encouraging phrases and they will go back into storage until I need them for the next project that is going to take longer than a day to complete. (1131 words)