

## Wide Screen

Thank goodness I have friends who can still take a deep breath, lift a hundred pounds and go 24 hours without a drink. I had two of them over to the house yesterday. Truthfully, they invited themselves when they heard I planned to install my wife's new television all by myself.

"You won't be able to do it," said Jim.

"I know how to hook up a TV," I replied.

"Not this one," he said. "It's a lot more complicated than the set you used for watching Gunsmoke years ago. Besides," he added, "Mrs. Dave told me what she bought. It's too heavy for one person to lift up on the wall."

"The wall?" I said.

"Dave, haven't you noticed that huge box on your back porch?"

"I thought that was a new refrigerator."

"It's your new TV, and she wants it mounted on the wall. With the super-strong forged steel mount, it'll weigh over two hundred pounds."

I didn't go with Mrs. Dave to buy the television set for two reasons. First, she was spending her own money. She knew I wouldn't want to pay for something I'd never watch. Second, I'm not a lot of fun to take to the store. If I had trudged around behind her in the brightly lit Big Box emporium, grumbling about prices, the state of the economy, the trouble with store clerks these days ... she guessed I'd argue for something less than she really wanted, far less than sixty inches wide. Actually she's correct, but I'm true to my principles, when I can remember them.

Before Jim and Doug arrived, I had all the parts in their little plastic bags laid out neatly on various chairs and tables in the back room that I call my library. I refer to it as a library, because that's exactly what it was when I built it, before my wife took it over, first with a small TV, then a larger one, and now the new set I call "The Billboard." I placed the installation manual in the center of the room on an old book table. The thick volume has pages for every tongue but sign language. I would think the 200 million people in the world who speak Urdu would qualify for their own installation manual, instead of sharing mine.

"Holy crap," said Doug, as he climbed the steps of the back porch and edged himself sideways around the casket-like carton. "How many TV's are in this box?"

"Just one," I said. "But when it's empty, I going to use it as a fishing shack."

The installation went well, with the two men doing all the work and myself making suggestions. I'm aware of what I do best.

"Do you know this guy?" Jim said to Doug as he nodded toward me after a while.

"No, but his wife is a friend of ours," Doug told him, "so I look after him when she's away."

I lined up the little plastic bags to help them, but they never took the part I offered next. Instead they followed some procedure that was a mystery to me. They had probably read the directions when they sent me outside to see if there were any television waves in the sky.

I called around the neighborhood to see if anyone was interested in pitching in five dollars to watch the weekend football game on our new giant screen. Only 84 year old Willard down the road expressed interest, but he would forget to pay and I'd be asleep in my chair when the game ended and he snuck out. Don't ask me how I know that. Willard and I are much alike.

"It's ready if you want to try the TV," said Jim when I got off the phone.

"Not if Gunsmoke has been canceled," I said.

Mrs. Dave really enjoys her new television set. It's so big that when there's a rapid change of scenes, I can see the flashes all the way to the road as I take the trash out at night. Soon passing drivers will be complaining, I tell her. But she doesn't listen to me. She bought a pair of stereo headphones to wear while watching her favorite shows. She says they drown out my grumbling and complaining.

But I never complain. I just sit opposite her wearing a golf visor and sunglasses as I read. In my library.

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