

“Lift and Shift”

Furniture removal is something we are all familiar with. Most of us have either moved house or helped friends do so, and 20th century comic silent films often featured runaway pianos or collapsing bed frames. Some years ago a prominent tea bag manufacturer commissioned a series of television advertisements featuring chimpanzees, apparently working as removal men. Their struggles with pianos and furniture were quite amusing but I know to my cost that shifting pianos and wardrobes is hard work and not particularly funny. There is a right way and a wrong way to move heavy items and I am now very familiar with the wrong way!

In our house we went through a few months of essential decorating in the run-up to a family wedding and of course this necessitated moving furniture from room to room or up and down stairs for temporary storage. On one occasion we were having laminate flooring and carpet laid and so the piano had to be moved the night before. Knowing that we probably couldn't move an old-fashioned upright piano with no castors without some difficulty, the man of the house constructed a “trolley” to make the job easier. A rectangular piece of sturdy wood with a castor wheel at each corner was constructed in the garage and produced for my approval. To prevent damage to the bottom of the piano, an old piece of carpet was wrapped around the trolley and secured by nails underneath. “This will make it much easier to move” he said confidently as he produced his handiwork with a flourish.

After dinner we cleared away and then prepared to move the piano in readiness for the new flooring the following day. The dining room table and chairs were moved aside and the trolley placed carefully beside the piano. We braced ourselves and then managed to lift the piano slightly towards the trolley which immediately shot across the floor to the other side of the room. “OK let's wedge it to stop it moving” he said. We tried again and this time balanced the piano across the trolley for all of three seconds before it lurched sideways and fell back to its' original position. In the end we had to leave the piano where it was and prevail upon the flooring fitters to help us. I wonder why we didn't think of that before!

On another occasion we were trying to move a mattress downstairs to be collected by the council on a pre-arranged day. It was a fairly old king-size mattress, extremely heavy and awkward and without the usual handles on the side. We managed to struggle with it from the bedroom, along the passage way to the top of the stairs, and there we encountered our first problem. We had to make a 90 degree turn to access the stairs! After ten minutes of “to you” and “now to me a bit” to-ing and fro-ing into the bathroom to allow the turn, we managed to get the mattress poised at the top of the stairs. I should mention here that our stairs consist of two short flights of steps with a half landing in the middle. We pushed the mattress down the first steps and then were faced with a 180 degree turn on the half landing.

This time there was no bathroom to give extra room to manoeuvre and after struggling to bend the mattress sideways we managed to get it completely stuck on the half landing. It was wedged solid. That was bad enough but we realised that I was on one side of the mattress and “him indoors” was on the other. I couldn't get upstairs to push and he couldn't get downstairs to pull. After some time spent blaming each other for our predicament and some colourful language we did the only thing we could do. We got the giggles and for several moments were laughing hysterically. I think if we hadn't laughed we would have come to blows.

Eventually the brains of the assembled company found that if he lay down on the stairs and pushed at the mattress with his feet whilst I almost swung on the top edge and pulled we managed to dislodge the thing and it lurched down the remaining stairs, narrowly missing a light in the hall and nearly killing the cat who was crouching in the hall directly in our path.

Fridge freezers are yet another hazard for amateur home removers to negotiate. Large, heavy, smooth sided and with no handles they are a nightmare to move. We needed to temporarily relocate a large fridge freezer from the kitchen to a small so called “party room” where we store drinks and glasses. This room is the other side of the house from the kitchen, so a sack barrow was brought in and we attempted to put the fridge freezer onto it. We managed this without too much trouble but then encountered some difficulty in pushing the barrow, especially across carpeted areas. Three steps lead down to the room, the fridge lurched, banged into the door frame and became badly dented. We also left a trail of some sort of liquid across the living room carpet and cracked the plug by trapping it under the fridge. I sustained bruising to my hand by forgetting to move it from the fridge whilst negotiating a door frame and we ran over someone's feet. He didn't stop complaining about that for hours!

On balance I would prefer never to move any furniture item ever again., It's hard work and fraught with difficulties. However, the bedroom is due for decoration and we may have to don overalls and “lift and shift” all over again. Put the kettle on and we'll get started.

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