

Under Construction

Seeing past what something or someone looks like on the outside has become a guiding principle in the life of our family. Krista has trained us to “get curious” about what we see in ourselves or about the behaviors we see coming out of other people. Her approach has helped us love in ways that we never would have been able to before. Even before Krista taught these emotionally intelligent lessons, we were unknowingly working them out in construction.

Krista and I had been married three years and we really wanted a home to lay down some roots. The problem was that we were dirt poor. There was a house I really wanted to buy in Ferndale, Washington. It had three bedrooms and two baths. Well, it would have that many when I put the house back together. I think the house may have been a crime scene! There were smoke stained holes in all the doors and walls. Many windows would need to be repaired. All the walls would need to be replaced too. The yard was a mess and the outside of the house had a very obnoxious peeling yellow paint. Amazingly, it was still on the market for just \$79,000.

It seemed no matter how I built the case, Krista could not see my vision for this house. To be fair, it may be worth noting that I had absolutely zero construction skills at this time in my life. I knew nothing, and yet, I had enough confidence to claim I could fix all these things. This was 1999. YouTube didn't exist. She turned me down in about two seconds. She didn't even act like it was a tough decision. Even though Krista was probably right, I still think about that house and what we could have done with it.

Instead we bought a nice house in great condition up the hill from my rejected yellow house. Krista could see how to make that place our home. It had four bedrooms and two bathrooms. There were no holes in walls or doors. Boring. Over our years there we painted the walls, installed some flooring, cased all the windows and changed out the molding. We rented a Bobcat to move a semi full of dirt and created a beautiful yard. Then we built a deck on the front of the house. We didn't open up any walls or add any rooms. There wasn't a whole lot of discovery going on or trauma created. It was a safe place for us to learn about construction, marriage, hosting others and living in community.

The next house we bought made my canary yellow house seem like a dream. I'm not kidding. The crawl space of this house actually had plug-ins for pot growing lights. On the day of closing, we opened the doors of our new home only to find out the previous owners hadn't moved out yet. We bought a house and apparently, we bought all of their junk too. Our friends helped move all of their stuff out and all of our junk in. This was the house where I became a construction worker. In the eight years we owned the house, there was only one room that I didn't tear down to the studs. We knocked down bricks, tore out the kitchen, added a bathroom and remodeled another one. We opened up the floor plan and put in a 20-foot beam through the attic. The plumbing was all replaced and by the end I was a master with mud, tape and texture. I could run electrical lines and lay a roof down as well. I still hated the finishing work though. I'd complete things to 90% and then I was ready for the next big project. This wasn't Krista's favorite part of my work ethic.

During this time I also built an office for our company in the back yard and I rebuilt my parents retirement home on the beach. I have no construction training and apparently no fear of failure. By this point, my darling children believed I could build anything. They also noticed that I hadn't built anything for them. Somehow elementary aged kids don't enjoy a beautifully tiled bathroom the way I thought they should. So, we started doing what we do best - we dreamt together. This was the treehouse dream.

We searched pictures and plans and finally settled on a two-story treehouse with a deck, a rock wall and a ten-foot slide to come down from the upper level.

Our spring break that year was spent building a foundation in between the trees in the back of our yard. The treehouse was 8 feet by 8 feet, and it was 20 feet tall! When I was putting on the roof, I actually had to harness myself to the trees for safety. We used windows as doors because the kids were still small. One weekend we rented a u-haul and drove 200 miles to get a slide we could mount to the second story. It was one of those curly fiberglass slides from the playgrounds - perfect for the kids new home. The summer was spent watching our little people live life in "their house". They'd created a pulley-system for getting things to the second story. Of all the things I've built, that treehouse was the most fun. Watching them play in the place I built for them brought me such joy.

I've wondered if that's how it is with God and us. I imagine him taking such joy in watching us play with the things he built. If you've ever climbed a mountain, sat in the mist under a waterfall, watched a sunset or sunrise out in the middle of the ocean, ridden through the desert on a camel, explored the depths of the Grand Canyon, floated in the Dead Sea or stared at the stars in the middle of Africa - then you've seen what you already know. God must love to build things. I marvel at things that have been made. I love discovering what I didn't know existed before. It's like pulling back the curtain on God's secret talents. To me, discovery like that is a lot like construction. It's not until I get to look at a house without any walls that I get to glimpse more of the plan. I can then envision what things can be. At that point, I'm closer to the builder than I had ever been before.

We moved to my dream house in 2012. It was another one of those places Krista didn't want to live. This huge house was built in the 70's with some strange design features. It had been on the market for 15 months and it had fallen in price so much we could afford it! By this point, Krista believed me when I said what we could do with it. She just didn't know if she wanted to live through a construction zone again. Well, she knew she didn't want to, the question was more about if I could convince her. I remember taking her to our future yard to watch the sun setting over the Olympic Mountains with the pink sky lighting up the waters of Puget Sound. We could see it all from our hillside paradise. And so it began.

I tore that house apart, literally brick-by-brick. Because the house was four stories, the chimney was taller than any I'd encountered. Tearing it down was a lot of fun! By this point, my construction mentor was Krista's secret weapon. Life with KF Events was beyond full-time, so my construction time was much more limited. Geoff got to do the building on this one. We added a fifth level to the house where we could wake up in the mornings staring at our beautiful mountain range.

Most of my life is spent thinking of others. It's not often that there is something that I treasure for myself. But in that house, I had been given something that I treasured. Waking up each morning staring at God's mountains was a gift to me that I can't describe. I loved every moment of it. I just didn't know our stay would be so short. The challenge of our surprise move to Florida was saying good-bye to the peaceful place I loved.

Regardless if it's a house or if it's a person, there is a story that lies beneath. The story is usually full of purpose and pain and life. If we're curious, if we stay present, if we pay attention, we just might see what people are made of. It's those moments that are the most beautiful and shocking and full of joy.

Seeing deeper into the lives of others was an invitation that God has displayed over and over again. Choosing young Joseph to rule over his family wasn't very popular with his brothers. Blessing the shepherd boy David to rule over King Saul just about got David killed multiple times. Jesus invites himself into the homes of guys who steal money for a living like the tax thief Zacchaeus. He even invites people like that to be his disciples? God selects Paul as his representative, a guy whose previous job involved killing Christians. When I see God choose these outsiders as his own, it teaches me to look deeper than what I can see on the outside.

When remodeling a house, we start by dreaming of what it can become. Sometimes we draw up plans, but nothing really happens until we start swinging a sledgehammer and knocking down some walls. We only find out what lies beneath the walls when we do something destructive first. I think this is counter-intuitive to how I want to live. I'd rather not think of my own life as a remodel project. But truthfully, it has been. A life under-construction is a life that is never complete. I think I've become good with that.

Today, we live in a huge house that builders built for us. I didn't do anything aside from picking out the finishings. We built this home for our friends who we didn't know yet. We built it to welcome those in need. We dreamed it would be a safe place and that we would become safe people for others. During construction, our friends prayed throughout the house before the sheetrock even went up. This home has a story. Under the sheetrock lies sharpie written prayers on the interior wood of the walls - written by us and by our friends. We prayed and we prayed that God would have his way in this place.

The people who fill this space are really what makes it special. Their vulnerability, and willingness to be who they really are is invited in our home. We expect our lives to be under construction, so it's no shock that we spend time in counseling from time to time, discovering if we're showing up as the people we mean to be. I think it's hard to open up the walls of our lives to discover what lies within. We may find some things that we don't like in there. In construction, I have found buried electrical wires that could have burned down our house – and in counseling I've found the same stuff in my life. Having a good counselor should be a pre-requisite for doing a major life remodel project.

I love it when I see others knock some walls down in their home or their life. And I love it even more when they're kind enough to share what they find with me. We don't have to build alone or for ourselves. The best building work probably happens when doing it to benefit others.