

Believe it or NOT.....

We get a lot of calls with plugged kitchen sinks. Most of these have garbage disposals. Now a garbage disposal is a continuous waste machine that requires you to have the machine up and running BEFORE you put food down. The most common mistake by homeowners is to shove things down there while washing dishes and turn the machine on later. I try and educate my clients on proper use of the machine. When they do experience a plug, I try and talk them through the process of plunging before they spend money on me. Well this particular call the woman said she is not capable of continuing to plunge as she has a new born baby who requires her time and attention. I went over, and I plunged her sink. I kept getting small pieces of plastic out of the sink. After 30 minutes of plunging both sides of her sink I was still getting plastic pieces and water would not go down. I got the rigid K 50 small sewer machine out and took the pipes apart under her sink. Those pipes were FULL of white cotton type material, plastic and food. I rodded through the clean out under the sink and got more than my ice cream pail would hold of this material. When my cable came back pretty much clear I put the pipes together and ran the sink and the disposal while plunging. IT FINALLY cleared. I cleaned up the mess and went downstairs to make sure I didn't just push the problem somewhere else. The laundry tub had to be cleared too. I went and got the new mother and was explaining to her how to properly use a garbage disposal. I told her about onion peels, coffee grounds and other items I would not recommend putting down the disposal. I showed her my overflowing pail and said, I don't know if a dish rag or two got stuck in the disposal, but this is what caused your blockage. With a very straight face she said, "oh those are diapers". I said, "YOU CANNOT PUT DIAPERS DOWN ANY DRAIN, it needs to be in your garbage." She went and got me a box of diapers and said, "read the label, these are the new kind of DISPOSABLE diapers".

Believe it or NOT. I have worked at Lichtfeld Plumbing for almost 35 years. In all those years I have NEVER encountered this situation before. YET Kyle, working at Lichtfeld Plumbing for less than a year has run into this 2x in a month. Both calls were for plugged kitchen sinks. Both calls Kyle could not get the K50 sewer machine cable in more than 12 feet without being totally stopped. He worked for an hour chipping away at the drain and whatever was in it. He finally tells the homeowner he will have to cut the pipe apart in the basement as he cannot get through. The first call he cut the pipe and found it packed full of RICE. He says to the homeowner your line is FULL of rice. Oh yes, they remembered they had a wedding there over the weekend and the left over 50# bag of rice was put down the drain. Now, the 2nd call he cannot get the cable through. I call the homeowner to inform her we have to cut the pipes apart in the basement as we cannot get our cable through whether we go down and out or up and in. So, I say to her, we had one like this a few weeks ago and it was packed full of RICE. She screams, "OH NO,,I just put two containers of rice down my drain on Friday. LEFT OVER CHINESE. Sure enough, rice packed inside the drain. So, Confucius say, RICE may not always fill belly, but it does pack your pipes.

My Dad is 82 years young and comes into the office every day. His knowledge and expertise is priceless in our plumbing service business. And his old fashion ethics is appreciated by us all. He grew up in an era where faucets were made out of brass (with lead) and stainless steel. You rebuilt them not replaced them. Same with toilets and valves. Plumbing was a skilled trade that took years of schooling and experience. You set toilets on cast iron collars and leaded them down. You sweated copper and threaded gas pipe. Plumbing was hard work.

Today, we don't rebuild we replace. Here at Lichtfeld Plumbing it is not from the lack of knowledge on rebuilding or the lack of will. We all learned at my father's side. There are several factors replace vs. repair. Lack of parts. How long does a manufacturer keep cartridges, orings and handles on a shelf? Some faucets like the one above is close to sixty years old (my dad installed when new) My Dad will tell you that the Chicago faucet company still has the same cartridge, and this is true. But, this faucet is not in fashion, it has lost its chrome finish and it is not water saving. The faucets today are water conserving, and in style. Yes, we can rebuild this faucet, but we recommend replacing it. Since a new faucet would be about the same price as rebuilding.

Now, this faucet is even older and with the new plumbing codes this faucet is no longer being manufactured nor are any equivalents. We don't want to replace the beautiful 1926 claw foot tub that this faucet is on. So, you rebuild. And sometimes that means my Dad goes through his archives to find a cartridge, he makes gaskets and he takes the tools from his grandfather and grinds down the seats and rebuilds the faucet.

My toilet story is a good one. We had a customer who had a Case toilet from 1948. A one piece 5-gallon flush toilet. We know the power of the Case toilet because we unplugged this woman's sewer one time and found a pillow case in it. HOW DID THAT GET IN THERE? One of the kids confessed they had stained it and tried hiding the evidence. The toilet did not plug but the house sewer line did. This toilet was a family ICON. So, when the toilet kept running they called us. (at 5 gallons per flush this could be expensive) Parts have not been made for this toilet since the late 1950's. The canister type ballcock should be in a plumbing museum. Of course, this toilet was a shade of pink and a member of this family so replacing it was not accepted with any cheers. My dad rebuilt the flush valve. Made some new parts out of brass and cut new gaskets. We installed it and the running stopped. However, the family toilet now moaned like a ghost with a belly ache whenever she was flushed. The lesser of two evils? They tried to live with the old moaning toilet for a month but when the toilet made itself known to guests at a dinner party they decided it was time to part company. Carrying the old toilet to the van while the family watched me out the window was an end of an era for this family.