

When my wife and I first bought a house, there was a lot to be done, as anyone who has ever moved knows. The house was large and roomy, with a two car garage (which, of course rarely ever held a vehicle of any kind). When I scoped out the site for the washer and dryer in that garage, I discovered that only one of the water lines had a valve in it. I checked the valve in front of the house, and it was frozen solid. And in my naiveté, I didn't think that it was legal to use the cutoff valve at the street. Anyway, I took this entire scenario as a sort of an engineering challenge.

It seemed to me to be the same as the routine problem that an oilwell-rigger has when his drill hits oil. They have to cap a gusher all of the time! As a scientist (and sometimes engineer), I knew that there was a simple straightforward solution to this problem. This was the sort of thing that I was trained for.

My basic strategy was this: you study the problem, plan the project, gather the needed hardware, and implement the solution. So I briefly glanced at the pipes and saw that while one had a faucet, the other was capped. I couldn't tell which was the hot an cold for sure, but it didn't really matter. It seemed obvious to me that all I had to do was take the cap off, thread on an open valve, and then close the valve off. It was as simple as that.

I bought a faucet at the hardware store and began the job after a full day at work. I didn't realize, of course, that if I did get into trouble that it was too late in the day to get professional help. When I think back on it, the funniest part of what I did in preparation was to get a water bucket to hold the water that would flow from the pipe. A bathtub would have been more appropriate.

Once I took the cap off of the pipe, the party started. The water (the hot water, naturally) came out in a jet and impacted me right in the center of my chest with tremendous force. From there it went in all directions, and soaked me from head to foot. I know that I looked like a drowned rat.

I tried again and again to screw the faucet on the pipe. Every time that it seemed to start to catch, it released again. The faucet was a right angle type, so as I turned the faucet the water sprayed in a complete vertical arc, so it hit the roof, walls and floor. The water covered the garage floor which was still filled with cardboard boxes of things from the house we rented.

The water finally turned from hot to cold, and I began to despair of getting my simple solution to work. I finally put my hand over the open pipe to stop the flow, and just stood there for a moment to reassess my situation. And pray for help, of course.

As I looked closer at the plumbing, I suddenly realized that there was one more section of pipe that I had to remove before the faucet could be screwed on. I took my hand off and the water began to flow again. But I removed the little piece and in just a moment I had the valve on and the water turned off. Success!

I felt a momentary thrill of exhilaration in knowing that I had actually accomplished my mission. And then I took a look around me. The garage floor was flooded, and filled with boxes of our belongings that were getting soaked. I took a fairly large piece of plywood and began to push the water outside. It took awhile, and about the time I was finishing up my family woke up from their nap and looked out the door at my disaster.

I got it all cleaned up and told my friends about it the next day at work. David Elrod then told everyone in his Wednesday night class before I could tell anyone else at church. So after church that night everyone was laughing about it (and me!). I didn't even get to enjoy telling the story to them. But now I get to tell it in my own way.