

When my husband got a job transfer to the metro Detroit area eight years ago, the housing market in the surrounding suburbs was booming. I stayed behind in Grand Rapids, so our children could continue school, while he scouted out our future home. He would call each evening to discuss the various houses he'd seen, but often by the next day, many of them would already be claimed. So he ended up making an offer on a home before I actually saw it. "Don't worry," he assured me. "It's great - marble flooring, spacious rooms, and an open floor plan. I can't believe everything we're getting for the price!"

I trusted him completely. I mean, I'd been married to the man for 12 years. I knew his taste. Yeah, I knew it. But I'd forgotten a few things. Like when we were first married, how he'd bought a beat-up Jeep with such big rust holes in the floor that you could actually see the road. How he'd spent many happy hours fixing that baby up -

stained carpet, fake wood kitchen countertops, and broken sliding door. Upstairs, the master bedroom strongly reminded me of the last hotel we'd stayed at.

"How come the bathroom sink is part of the bedroom?"

"I dunno. Some kind of '80s trend I guess," he mumbled, pacing the length and width of the room.

Initially, I admit, I was incredibly depressed in our new home. As usual, my handy hubby wanted to do the renovations himself. But the thing is, he has this *other* job that takes up a lot of his time and actually pays him money. So, it's been a slow process. Over time, however, I've actually come to appreciate the advantages of having a fixer-upper that you don't have the funds or time to fix up quite yet.

First of all, ancient ceramic tile is really hard. So, during those snowy, winter months when my 5-year-old wanted to go rollerblading, I'd strap on his helmet and let him do it in the house. The open

HOME IMPROVEMENT

by holly bowne

eventually selling it for a loss a year later. I had forgotten how our first home had been abandoned for more than a year and needed a lot of work just to make it livable. I'd forgotten how much he loves a good fixer-upper.

When I finally stepped through the front door of our "new" home, I opened my mouth but no words came out.

"Isn't it great!" my husband exclaimed. "It's got lots of potential." The house had been built in 1978 - and looking around, I was pretty sure it hadn't been updated since then.

"Where's the marble flooring?" I managed to squeak, squinting to see in the darkened rooms. Brown metal blinds covered every window. "This is some sort of ancient ceramic tile. And is the grout supposed to be that dirty gray color?"

"Well, I *thought* it was marble," he replied, barely glancing down, visions of refinished wood trim and renovated rooms dancing before his eyes.

The walls were papered in a distinctive floral pattern reminiscent of my great grandmother's china. My eyes took in the suspiciously yellow-

floor plan worked great. He could do speed work in the foyer, then practice his jumps down one step into the living room.

An advantage of the old kitchen countertops is that I don't need to bother with cutting boards. Yep. I just chop my vegetables right on the counter. I mean, we're going to be replacing them, anyway ... eventually.

And the old, stained carpeting? Perfect for when we decided to get a puppy. We cleaned up his potty-training accidents with a smile, knowing we'd be replacing that 20-plus-year-old carpeting ... some day.

Bottom line - our home is a warm, comfortable place to gather with family and friends. Under our almost-time-to-be-redone roof, we've experienced the sorrows and celebrations of life. And though our home still needs a lot of work, it's what's inside that matters - and what's inside is my beautiful, loving family.

Holly Bowne lives in her new and improved home in Novi. To comment on this essay, or to submit your own, go to strutmag.com.