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## Mr. Recycle

Executive dumpster diver is a label that Greg Ekrem attempts to shrug off. He prefers to call himself a “hobbyist repurposer and recycler.” However, as he shows me around his collection of recycled creations, it becomes obvious that Greg has been as resourceful in acquiring materials as he has been reusing them.

“Okay, I guess I did go into a dumpster for that,” he says pointing at an aluminum ladder that has been refashioned into a set of monkey bars for his daughters’ play structure. And he also admits that his patio was made from bits of stone left by other people’s trashcans.

“I just hate to see good stuff go to waste,” he says unapologetically.

And the urge to repurpose started early in Greg’s life. He recalls foraging, as a 9-year-old, through the dumpsters of Ball Aerospace in search of aluminum to build a miniature cross bow.

“That was the first time when I went out recycling. Of course it was for a weapon because I was a boy,” he jibes.

Since then, however, Greg says he has stuck to more socially acceptable techniques to acquire materials. In particular, he credits the Center for Resource Conservation (CRC), which salvages used building

materials and resells them for “pennies on the dollar” for keeping his repurposing habit going.

“When Ressource came, that was like a wannabe dumpster diver’s heaven,” says Greg. “It is like one gigantic dumpster full of treasures out there.”

With materials from the CRC, Greg has gone on to build an empire of repurposed

creations, including a shed from wholly-recycled materials, a folding table in his kids’ playroom, and a coat rack with reused door knobs for hangers.

“I like trying to come up with different uses for things,” he says. “I like looking at something, like the picnic table out at resource, and thinking that would make a fantastic door.” Ironically a door on hinges

that he also acquired re-birthed as a folding table.

A table for a door and a door for a table – such are the contradictions in the land of repurposing.

Greg often finds materials just by walking round the neighborhood. Finding a tossed out barbecue grill, he says, “is like finding a twenty in the dumpster.” The last one that he retrieved and refurbished lasted him five years. If nothing else, he breaks them up and recycles the metal.

When asked what drives his hobby, he candidly admits, “It is about a third being me, a third being environmentally inspired, and a third being cheap.”

But the concern for the environment, he admits, is a not an insignificant factor. Currently helping out with a friend’s remodel, Greg describes how they took great care to remove the dated Formica kitchen cabinets so they could be reused. They then found someone to donate the cabinets to.

“They basically got a free kitchen remodel because we took our time and kept it out of a landfill,” says Greg.

“I realize that somewhere along the line that junk is going to get recycled. But, ultimately, I hate to see good stuff thrown away.”

