

# Borrowed Tool Project Archive at the Carlisle Tool Library in Carlisle, Pennsylvania

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Sometimes during this period of distancing, I take a break from doing whatever it is that I'm doing, and wonder: what are the ways in which we know each other? I know people's eyes, their hands, the way they walk, the sound of their voices. I know the way they laugh and the music they listen to. But, what would it be like to get to know someone by observing what they make? Or by seeing what tools they use to fix things? We do this naturally to a certain extent by recognizing a friend's loaf of bread, the jingle of their keys, or duct tape quick-fixes left behind. But, most of these memories are not compiled anywhere other than in our minds.

The Borrowed Tool Project Archive exists within a Tool Library in south-central Pennsylvania that serves members from six adjacent counties. The space encourages an accessible sharing economy that prioritizes relationships, and I've worked with this organization for a little over 2 years. Originally, I wanted to start the archive because I realized that, although tools were being checked out from the library and work was being done, we didn't have any way to look back and reflect upon members' projects. Several of our members, including Brionna (pictured later), sent us some wonderful documentation of their work, and the more I asked around, the more projects I came across. The Project Archive is both a practical and imaginative solution. It is a vessel that suggests the importance of documenting work, while at the same time creating a way to collectively explore personal efforts. By compiling this evidence of labor, we see the people of a community represented by the things that they make and repair. We celebrate the mundane and the extraordinary simultaneously! While thinking about the ways we can interact with this documentation, I dream of a space in which all things evoke wonder.

The cycles of the natural world around me seem more visible at this moment in time—with the turning of a fresh, green season and rainfall on warmer days. These spirals show up in everyday life, in both built and natural environments: things activate, they change, and then they regenerate. Last week, a large rip emerged in my bed's fitted sheet. I dug through a bin of scrap fabric and found several leftover muslin sampler pieces that I made months ago. I sewed them together to make a patch, and pinned it to the sheet. I sewed along the frayed edges, strengthening the material so that it could once again be a bed covering. It's different now, but it works, and shows signs of

that cycle of wear. My tendency toward repair, in addition to leading workshops for varied skill levels, has taught me how important material experimentation is to problem solving. The Borrowed Tool Project Archive acknowledges this tactile learning process, and it freezes snapshots to view along the way.

Getting a glimpse into the way another person interacts with their environment seems commonplace, but sometimes I forget how often I gain knowledge from this kind of observation. This archive is in a space built for collaborative learning, applying knowledge, and re-imagining systems—it reminds us that all kinds of interaction: material and social, can be evidenced by recording intentional acts of sharing.

*The following exchange takes place between two separate recollections. One is shared by Jeff Adams, co-founder of the Carlisle Tool Library. The other is shared by Mary Adams, Jeff's mom, who is on the Tool Library's board and served as its treasurer for the first two years of operation. The recollections were edited and compiled by Mo Geiger.*

JEFF ADAMS: I remember a time when Jo and I wanted to motorize a bike.

MARY ADAMS: The tools of my trade when I first began were pencil, paper, and erasers. Later they included adding machines and finally computers. I have not enjoyed learning to use computers, but I have made my peace with them.

J: We took a lawnmower motor and tried to mount it to a bike, and we rigged up this mount and added some chains and pulleys to the motor.

M: I presume you could also add printers and copiers to this mix. I am often surprised with how proficient I have become changing ink and toner cartridges.

J: And in the end, it didn't work; we didn't have the right alignment with some of the parts that

were needed, but just trying to get it to work was fun.

M: I am still frustrated that I never was taught to maintain a bicycle, and at this point it would require someone with great patience to teach me.

J: But it did stick with me, in terms of just being able to tinker. Because that was one of the first projects I ever tinkered with, and a lot of it was (with) Jo's guidance. Even though we were both kind of new to it. At the time he worked on his own truck and his dad's motorcycle I believe. But this was before we were 16.

M: I have no idea when the first time I repaired something was, as girls were not encouraged to learn to use tools when I was a child unless they were for cooking, cleaning, sewing or other household chores deemed acceptable for girls to do. None of

these interested me, and sewing was actually something I hated. My eyes were so bad they put me in bifocals in 2nd grade to see if it would help, but gave up when I continually tripped on steps. Threading a needle was torture for me.

J: You know, when you're with a group of people, or with a friend, then it always makes it more memorable—working on something jointly.

M: I do remember a few times that I actually learned to use a tool and was glad of it.

J: Trying to tinker on your own by yourself, without prior knowledge, is kind of like fishing around in the dark.

M: When I first got my driver's license and asked to take the car, my father said I could, after I showed him I was proficient with charging a battery and changing a tire.

J: You don't always know what you're doing.

M: He showed me how to do both in the driveway. I used to know which color clamp to put where on a battery, but I would have to consult a cellphone to do it now.

J: Yeah. I think the confidence that comes with being able to learn something new, the confidence to learn how to be in control of your surroundings, is a huge plus.

M: I have changed tires on my own when stuck in remote areas, but I always have to jack the car down after I jack it up, since each time I forget to loosen the nuts first. I can tie basic knots, and rope is a tool, I think. I was somewhat dangerous with a knife, but I can build a wicked fire and pitch a tent or put up a tarp.

J: There's something really powerful about just experimenting with tools. Not necessarily, you know, using it in the exact specific way that it was meant for, but there's many tools that have multiple uses. And learning the ins and outs of various tools is just part of the fun...

M: I do remember, however, fixing more than one exhaust pipe with wire hangers. I think I surprised Jeff and his brothers when I did that once in Bedford. I can jumpstart a car with manual transmission by rolling it, and (I) used to park on hills with one particular vehicle to be able to do so since the battery died regularly. I guess that does not involve tools.

J: ... figuring out what you can do with certain things.

M: I think the tool I like best may be a good snow shovel. I enjoy getting out in the cold and making a neat path through the fresh fallen snow.



Above: Emily and her mom Patti in an archive image, showing their finished cutting boards after a workshop at the Tool Library.

Below: Mo assists Caroline with textile repairs. Archived as part of a Tool Library workshop series called "Home Sewn."



Above: Process image of a wood-fired cob oven project: made from earth, stone, sand, straw, and bricks. Submitted to the archive by Jeff.

Right: Images from Brionna that are now included in the Archive. Here [above] she is pictured with her son, working on their flooring project as a surprise for his dad. Second image [right] shows the tools they used on the project.

