

sledgehammer love

THEY LAUGHED WHEN I PICKED UP MY BIG TOOL by daniel partner

I try to gather hope when I see my body in a gym-club mirror. Its shape isn't so bad. But I'd sure like a little more muscle and some subtle dimensional shifts. That's why I'm there. But I won't persevere long enough, despite good intentions. Eventually traipsing to the gym, enduring the locker room, submitting to music that was never in my vinyl collection, marveling that the young woman on the neighboring Stairmaster doesn't have more modesty, speculating about the bacterial population of the shower room floor, and those fiendishly repetitive machines — this defeats me. Plus, it's boring.

Still, I want the pleasure of toned muscles. What should I do, roll around on the floor counting sit-ups and push-ups? That's fiendish without the machines, and there are still bacterial issues. Plus, it's lonely.

They laughed when I began to exercise with my 10-pound sledgehammer. But they knew nothing of Shovelglove. And I, though no Will Rogers, only knew what I'd read on the web: That with Shovelglove I can move my body in the real-world patterns of physical laborers and exercise all major muscle groups. Come to find out, I can do this in the good company of my own memories and imaginings.

What's Shovelglove? Its simply a sledgehammer and a kitchen timer. What are the movements? They're shoveling, chopping, hoisting, stoking, cutting and anything else that may come to mind. That's the beauty of it: So much comes to mind in a 14-minute workout.

That's right, 14 minutes is the length of a Shovelglove session once every weekday. Reinhard Engels, the man behind Shovelglove, explains: 14 minutes is "one minute less than the smallest unit of schedulistically significant

time." As a unit of time, it is unimportant. Everyone has 14 minutes to spare for physical exercise.

I start by swinging my sledgehammer in a brisk shoveling motion. The rhythm of this takes me to the horse stalls back in Connecticut where, while mucking them out, I'd talk things over with the horses. They'd listen. Next I move the hammer up and down, heavy end above my head, as if it's a pitchfork tucking hay bales up in a high stack. My neighbor near Brookville, Ohio, comes to mind. He was a lapsed Black Bumper Mennonite to whom, one hot summer harvest day, I lent a hand in throwing hay.

There's a Shovelglove motion that looks like a fireman hacking through a wall. I've named it the "John Henry." He was a steel driver for the Chesapeake and Ohio Railroad as it tunneled through the Appalachians. They say he died still gripping his hammer, victorious in competition with a steam-driven machine. As I swing my hammer like him, his song comes to mind.

A vertical up-and-down motion of the hammer at waist level is called "churn butter," which doesn't do much for me. But the move is similar to working a posthole digger. This image, combined with "drive fence posts" — a high pounding motion — might transport me to the North Kansas prairie where my great-grandfather homesteaded the land he received for soldiering with the Pennsylvania 63rd Regiment.

At the end, I spend a few minutes with a motion that mimics the easy torso-turning and arm-swinging movements of mowing with a scythe. Following the work of pounding, chopping, lifting, hoisting and stoking, this is calming. Someone else may call it meditative. I'll call it poetic.

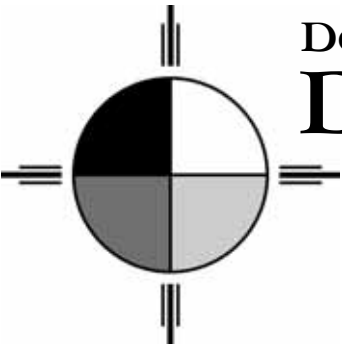


PHOTO COURTESY JENNIFER LITTLE, LOCOMOTIVE COURTESY OREGON COAST HISTORICAL RAILWAY

As Robert Frost wrote in *Mowing*: "There was never a sound beside the wood but one/ And that was my long scythe whispering to the ground."

For more information, go to www.shovelglove.com **ew**

Daniel Partner is a writer and editor who slings his big hammer in Coos Bay. He was featured in our Paddle Oregon story Sept. 30, 2010.



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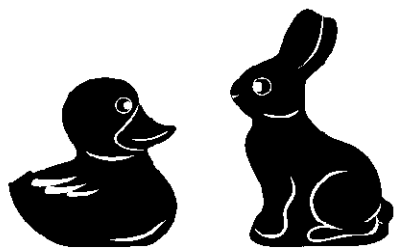
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"How are you, Rabbit?" asked Chocolate Duck. "Well, Duck, I'm looking for the perfect gift for my special Some-Bunny for Valentine's Day," replied Chocolate Rabbit, looking quite perplexed. "I've picked some lovely flowers and I've made a nice card, but I'm looking for something more to really express my love." "Don't forget the chocolate!" said Duck. "Ah, yes, that would be perfect!" cried Rabbit. "I quite agree" said Duck.



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