



# One man's fight against entropy

## IF I BUY SOMETHING, I SHOULD BE ABLE TO FIX IT

By ED HUNT  
For The Daily Astorian

I'm a dented-tank kind of guy. I like fixing things, bringing them back from the dead or disappear.

I say dented-tank because, when I bought my third motorcycle, I had a choice: I could have bought a garage queen — a bike that lived its life under cover, ridden on weekends and never seeing a drop of rain or mud. My other option was a bike that had been ridden hard, that had a lot of miles cross country running up from Texas by way of the California coast. I bought the bike that had survived the miles of life and had stories to tell.



I bought the bike with the dented tank. I like restoration, even though I'm not much of a details person. I hold no illusion that I'm any good at it.

Yet I love reviving old things that have begun on their path of increasing entropy. It is my way of fighting the deterioration of the world.

I guess I do my best to fix people, too, in my chosen career. As a nurse in the emergency department, people come in sick and I make them better, or get them to someone else who can. It is the nature of emergency nursing to identify the problem and find a solution. It is the same process as repairing an old motorcycle or fixing plumbing. I call it "instant gratification nursing."

### A fixing addiction

Our house is more than 100 years old. When we bought it 25 years ago, entropy had settled in and made itself at home. Renters had occupied the house for several years, the roof leaked, windows were broken out of their weathered double-hung frames and the plumbing was mostly strung-together hot water heater hoses.

Yet the bones were good. Amy and I — married only a year at that point — moved in with the ambitions of a nesting newlywed couple. We bought old handyman books from thrift shops since newer books really didn't apply to our lathe and plaster walls. We taught ourselves as we went — this in the days before YouTube and the Internet.

Through years of sweat equity we brought it back to life — saved it from rotting away and being dragged to the ground by blackberry vines.

The first year was cold and drafty and damp, hard work made the house warm and cozy.



Ed Hunt photos

**TOP:** Ed Hunt's Vstar 650 'El Burro' in front of the covered bridge in Grays River.  
**ABOVE LEFT:** Dented tanks are a sign that something has lived a life and has a story to tell — and needs you to bring it back from disuse and deterioration.  
**ABOVE RIGHT:** It took hours of work on rainy nights, but the results are often worth it.  
**BELOW:** Our latest project needs a little work: a 1972 Prowler camper in need of some TLC before we go camping.



Taking something broken and fixing it gives an addicting kind of satisfaction.

When the girls were younger, they wanted electronic games that I was just too cheap to buy new. So I bought used ones with broken cases and loose wires, repaired them using videos on YouTube and instructions on Ifixit.com and Instructables. Compared to my old 1960s Handyman books, the Internet is a Godsend. Instant access to people who have diagnosed the problem and found a solution — people with more knowledge and skills than I have.

Some early Apple iPods were easy to repair, so I could buy a used one for a couple bucks and have it working like new in a rainy afternoon.

### All about profit

Unfortunately, manufacturers have worked to keep repair information secret and limit access to parts in recent years. These companies make more money if you throw away something that is broken and buy a new one. If you simply fix it when it's broken, they don't profit — unless you

pay them to fix it. Increasingly, companies fight green standards that enable the repair, reuse, recycling and product life extension of electronics.

Companies like Apple and Microsoft will go out of their way to make sure people can't re-use or extend the life of their products. Eric Lundgren, a California electronic waste recycler has gone to jail for making copies of restore disks that always get lost when you buy a computer. The discs were based on free information online and would only work with valid licenses.

Yet Lundgren made it so people could reuse old computers. So Microsoft went after him in federal court.

Apple only made iPod batteries available after losing a class action lawsuit. I've been repairing Apple products for decades, but recently Apple customer service told me they wouldn't help me restore a phone — even though I was the legal owner and was fully in compliance with their published policies on the matter. It wasn't stolen or lost, they just wanted me to throw away a perfectly good working phone

because they'd rather sell me a new one.

I worked on cars when I was younger, but living in this rural area, we were often too dependent on our vehicles to trust my meager knowledge and skills. I mostly leave essential transportation to the professionals.

Moreover, newer cars heavily depend on computers. These computers have on-board diagnostics, but car companies try to limit access to the tools to read the codes as well as access to the tools to repair the cars themselves. They want you to bring your car to the dealer so they can make money on the repairs. But you own the car; you should be able to bring it to an independent shop, or fix it yourself.

### 'Right to Repair'

Right to Repair laws would make it so I can fix the things I own without begging the manufacturer for permission. Federal automotive Right to Repair legislation has been languishing under discussion for years.

However, Repair.org lists 17 states that have introduced "Right to Repair" legislation requiring companies to make parts and manuals available to local shops and product owners. The legislation would also prevent use of software locks to block repairs or from remotely bricking electronics that use aftermarket parts.

When it comes to electronics, however, Washington state has gone a step further with House Bill 2279. That bill would prohibit the sale of electronic products designed to "prevent reasonable diagnostic or repair functions by an independent repair provider." Designing products so they are difficult to repair or reuse "helps accelerate the path of those devices to the waste stream," explained Washington state Rep. Jeff Morris to Motherboard magazine. "So we're trying to keep the philosophy our state is behind, which is recycle, repair, reuse."

Meanwhile, I'm taking a break from old motorcycles and electronics. My latest project is a 1972 camper that needs some TLC.

Of course, there were a few others out there, and for a little more money I could have had something newer. Something that didn't come with a leaky roof, dents and faded paint.

I guess it is a bad habit, but darn it ... If I buy something, I should be able to fix it. I like fighting entropy.

Ed Hunt is a writer and registered nurse who blogs on medical issues at [redtriage.com](http://redtriage.com) and on other subjects at [theebtide.blogspot.com](http://theebtide.blogspot.com). He lives in Grays River, Wash.