

Graham Paint/ 773-585-9110

## *A day at Renaissance Decorating*

Adam turned the key into the Schalge lock and entered the building with the RENAISSANCE DECORATING in bold block letters over the doorway. He filled up Mr. Coffee and sat down to review his e-mail.

The door opened and a late-thirties woman walked in. “Hi Adam, what a great day!”

“Sure is, Sarah, Adam replied, “It’s a great day for painting!”

Sarah and Adam were brother and sister. Adam was a few years older. Just then, the door opened and their younger brother Josh strolled in. “Hi all, how’s the coffee situation?”

“Help yourself, Josh, it’s just finished brewing.” Adam replied as he picked up a memo off his desk.

“What’s this? Geez, don’t tell me, another complaint! I hate these things!” he moaned.

“Cheer up big guy, we don’t have that many complaints. Remember what that guy from Graham Paint says, sometimes a complaint allows us to get to know our customers better and if we handle it right, we make a customer for life. What is the complaint?” Josh said as he wolfed down a bagel piled high with cream cheese.

“It’s about the Randolph job, you know, the 4000 sq ft. house with the cedar siding up on the hill. Marty was up there yesterday.” Marty was Adam’s son and was working in the business during the summer break from Yale. “Marty says there is a lot of peeling. Sarah, would you please pull the G2 sheet (G2 is a term coined in World War 2 for intelligence gathering) on the Randolph job? I think it was about 2 years ago.”

Sarah pounded the keyboard and printed out a sheet. Adam looked at the G2 sheet while both Josh and Sarah peered over his shoulder. The sheet contained a lot of information concerning the job. The dates, the painters, number of hours, the weather conditions, the substrate, a detailed description of the preparatory work that was done, the moisture content of the wood, the detailed application method and tools used, the products used and their batch numbers, the amount of paint left over, the total amount of paint used, the coverage, as well as contact and payment information were all neatly recorded on the G2 sheet.

“Well, we used Graham’s Universal Primer 100-00 with a finish coat of 142 Aqua Borne Ceramic® Lo Sheen, 8713 Kindling Wood. Our very best, we hardly ever have complaints with it.” Sarah said.

“What’s this here?” Adam asked, pointing to some numbers on the sheet.

Sarah grinned as she responded, “Well, you gave Marty that portable GPS device for his birthday, and now he records the latitude and longitude of all our jobs!”

Adam rolled his eyes and looked toward heaven. “Give me strength!” he

“Josh, how about you and I go take a look at the Randolph house before we go over to the school?” Renaissance decorating had the contract for maintenance for the local school district.

Adam and Josh drove up the winding brick drive to the Randolph house. The house was a modern designed two-story house with lots of windows. The siding was all smooth cedar and all the trim was rough sawn cedar. There was a lot of trim surrounding all the windows and on every corner. The trim pieces were perfectly flat with no contour. The plain boards contributed to the rustic appearance of the building. Adam knocked at the door that was quickly answered by a distinguished looking man in his sixties.

“Hello, Mr. Randolph,” Adam and Josh chimed together.

“I see we have the big guns here today.” Winston Randolph retorted. “I trust you will find and correct the problem with that defective paint.”

“That’s why we are here, although I’m not sure the paint is defective. We need to investigate a bit to determine what is going on.” Adam said.

“This side looks pretty good except for that trim up on the gable.” Josh said as they continued to walk around the house.

“This side looks alright too,” Adam said, “I don’t see any peeling here.”

“It looks as if the problem is all on this one side of the building except for those gables which also are peeling. None of the siding is peeling, it’s all the trim that is the problem.” Adam said as he scratched his chin.

“Did you guys try to make a few extra bucks by using an inferior paint?” Randolph shot.

“Mr. Randolph, we used the best paint we know of. We have had great success with it over the years. If the paint were bad, it would be failing all over the house, not just on this side. Something else is going on.” Josh said, perhaps a little too defensively.

“Well, you people are the experts, what *is* going on?” Randolph exclaimed.

“At this point, I’m not sure. We need a little time to evaluate the situation.” Adam said calmly.

“Well, when you obtain some answers, let me know.” Randolph stormed back into his house.

“Adam, it looks like we did everything right yet we have a problem. What went wrong?” lamented Josh.

“I don’t really know, Josh, I think it’s time to call in Sol.” Adam said as they walked back to their truck. Adam called Sol and asked him to meet them at the Randolph house.

Sol was their father who had started the business 60 years ago. Now 85 years old, he still drove himself to the office several times a week. His hair was mostly gone except for some snow-white curly fringe around his ears. His hands were gnarled yet still strong from swinging a brush for 70 years. He had intense blue eyes that didn’t miss much and seemed to penetrate right through you.

“Hey, Dad, hi Pops,” Adam and Josh greeted as Sol walked up to join them in front of the house.

“What’s amatter, can’t you kids do anything by yourselves? Do you always need to drag an old man into your problems?” Sol chided his two sons.



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*Good record-keeping can  
help solve problems*

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“Dad, we did everything right, yet the paint is peeling after only two years.” Adam explained.

Sol walked around the house stopping to pick up some paint chips that had flaked off the house. After examining the chips and walking all around the house, he asked his sons. “How long after the siding and trim was installed was it painted?”

“Gee, I don’t know,” Adam said, “ we don’t have that info on our G2 sheet. Is it important?”

“You betcha it’s important,” Sol explained, “see if you can find out.”

Adam went around and got Randolph out again. “Mr. Randolph, do you remember how long it was between the time the siding was installed and it was painted?”

“I remember exactly because my wife was on my back for months to get it painted. We were having a swimming pool installed and I wanted to get that done before the painting began. The siding went up in April and you started the painting in September.”

Adam went back to his dad and brother and relayed the information. “That is what I thought,” Sol said, “the wood was up for several months before it was painted.”

“So what does that mean?” Josh asked.

“It means a lot. It is what caused the peeling.” Sol said. “When raw wood is exposed to the sun, UV rays strike the raw wood and degrade the walls of the wood cells. Wood is composed of cells just as all living creatures are, including ourselves. The hard cell walls are what give wood its strength. When they degrade, they turn into soft fuzzy fibers barely connected to the solid wood underneath. When you paint the surface of this degraded wood, the wood sticks to the fuzzy wood fibers OK but the fibers are already loose from the solid wood surface and after a few years, they come loose all the way taking the paint right with them.”

“But why only this one side of the house and the gables are affected?” Josh asked.

“Note that this is the South side of the house and only the trim pieces on the south side of the gables are peeling. Also, only the rough sawn cedar is peeling on these sides. What is happening is the sunlight from the South is more intense and has degraded the South sideboards more than the other sides where the sun is not so intense. Also, the rough sawn cedar has much more surface area exposed to the sun because of the roughness of its surface so it degrades more quickly than the smooth siding.”

“Wow, pop, how did you learn about this?” Josh asked.

“Well, I’d like to tell you you’ve got a smart old man, but it is something I learned reading a report from the United States Forest Products Laboratory in Madison, Wisconsin. They claim that raw wood exposed to the sun for as little as 2 weeks before painting adversely affects the life of the paint.” Sol said. “The lesson is paint new wood just as soon as you can.”

“That’s a good lesson, Dad, the question we now need to answer is how do we correct the problem?” Adam asked.

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*“A complaint gives you the opportunity to get to know your customer and build a lasting relationship.”*

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“Well, the best way of course would be to remove all the paint and start from scratch. However, that probably won't fly. I would remove as much loose paint as possible now, spot prime the bare spots, and wait a month to see if any other paint loosens up. If not much does, I would give the whole house a coat of the same product you used originally. Of course, I assume you used a good 100% acrylic.” Sol admonished.

Although Renaissance Decorating is fictional, this story is based upon an actual experience. We have talked about this subject before, but it is an important subject and requires reinforcement

Not many people including many builders and painters recognize the importance of painting new wood just as soon as possible after installation outside. Here is an excerpt from a National Forest Products Association report On “Finishing Exterior Wood Products” issued in 1991:

#### **Short Term Weathering of Unfinished Wood.**

**“Short term weathering will cause only slight visible degradation of unfinished wood; however, recent studies have shown that weathering for as little as two to four weeks can reduce adhesion of subsequently applied coatings and thus increase the probability of failure at the wood/paint interface. Because of reduced performance of paint on weathered wood, it is strongly recommended that any wood exposed to weathering be protected within two weeks of installation with some finish that will prevent photodegradation and water damage.”**

*Tip: Before you paint new wood outside, examine the surface very closely. Scrap you fingernails over the surface. Are there a lot of loose fuzzy fibers caught under your nail? Firmly press a piece of scotch tape to the wood surface. Yank it up. Are there a lot of wood fibers on the tape? If the answer is yes to these questions, the degraded wood must be removed from the surface or the paint is likely to peel. Removing the degraded wood can be done by sanding or wire-brushing.*