



Old farmhouses are full of stories.

They hold tales of generations born, raised and moved on into life. They harbor reminiscences of joy and love, of sadness, sometimes of tragedy. Their nooks and crannies are stuffed with memories of birth and death and family gatherings, of festive holidays and years of routine daily living.

All played against the stage setting of a beloved family home.

Old farmhouses show bumps and bruises and scars accumulated through life, cracks in walls, nicks in doorframes, nail holes punched, abandoned, and punched somewhere else. Floors

which begin to sag after a time and windows reluctant to open and close. Doors which fit their frames only because they were specifically cut to fit not-quite-perfect openings. Stair steps worn and curved, imprinted by countless footsteps of hard boots and fuzzy slippers, toddlers scaling the stairway mountain, toenails of dogs clicking up and down.

Old farmhouses are colored with personality and character and quirks painted by years of experience. Intrinsic charm, however, does not always equate with convenience.

"Ow!" I yelped one morning

last week, rubbing the top of my head after having clunked it against a sharp corner of the computer printer table. The resulting tender spot reminded me of just how irascible old farmhouses can be in the struggle to bridge their historic charm to modern technology.

When rural electrification finally "voted" into farmsteads, the convenience of having one, or at daring extreme perhaps two, electrical outlets per room was surely luxury beyond imagination. Like most residents of old farm homes, we've wrestled with original electric layout for several decades, rewiring, remodeling — and buying extension cords in bulk. Most of our rooms sported sparse and inconveniently located outlets. At least one upstairs must be accessed though a closet added to compensate for history's lack of storage space.

Maybe it's that antique wiring that lends our old farmhouse to being thunderstorm target-prone. Or maybe it's our location, at the end of our rural electric cooperative line, that attracts lightning bolts like flies to a nightlight. Whatever the reason, the slightest hint of thunder rumbles send

me racing around the house yanking plugs.

Some time ago, on the recommendation of a television repairman's counseling over the latest storm-zapped tube outage, I purchased a good quality surge protector. Wasn't too long until a lightning zing not only got the television again, but fried the surge protector in the process. Reading the fine print, I found a phrase about not being guaranteed against acts of God.

So, what is the point, I pondered?

Still, I wouldn't have a computer system without one. And it was that surge protector that rendered me a head-banger last week. Unable to access the computer desk telephone or connect to e-mail following a storm, I began plugging and unplugging and replugging various phones around the house. Turned out not to be any of the phones, but the surge protector's phone "section" which The Farmer heard "sizzle" during one too-close lightning crack.

Plugging the phone direct into the wall jack, bypassing the surge unit, works fine. Never mind that this original house phone jack

sits squarely behind a leg of the office desk, hemmed in by file cabinet and printer table — the one with the sharp-edged corner.

The Farmer promises when he has a few moments during this super busy season to install a more convenient phone jack, freeing me from a duck-crawl-plug operation currently necessary to access e-mail. But, that may have to wait while we deal with a concurrent gluche, a stopped-up drain pipe leaving the house. This major drain clog not only generated installation of new-shiny-white, under-sink plumbing, but cleaner-than-usual, and well-mopped kitchen and basement floors.

In process of tackling our drain backup, turned out the kitchen sink plumbing wasn't the original problem. It just basically fell apart from old age during the investigative process. And we had to keep searching.

Old farmhouses not only have charm, personality and tales to tell.

Ours is a practical joker to boot.

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