

Skill Sets

Today, just minutes ago, I, the impoverished student, stripped and spliced a totally new section of the decrepit power cord to my laptop. In need of my computer for everything one could possibly need a computer for, I packed a roll of electrical tape this morning, assuming I would be able to find some time between classes to figure out how to get power back. That time, moments ago, came of course in an inopportune place, though I suppose the library café is as good a location to rip apart your electronics as any other.

No, they don't have a pair of scissors I can use; yes, they have a plastic knife, with which I promptly cut myself. Feeling slightly stupid, I no less impressed Helen when, within fifteen minutes, I had repaired the one thing I need to keep the light of my life running.

Where did I learn to do this? Middle school. Why do I remember this? Because even then I knew it was a weird thing to have to learn. But what am I thinking about right now? My grandmother.

Years ago—I couldn't put a date on it—I stood behind my grandmother, watching her in the bathroom mirror as she painted on her eyeliner, jerked a pick through her “blonde” hair. She said to me, “What you are learning right now, Meghanne, is the fine art of makeup.”

Did I learn it? No. I probably rolled my eyes even then, years out of my tomboy phase. I've never worn much makeup, and that's by no means my grandmother's fault—wait; maybe it is. It's a rare lesson I believe is worth retaining when a the teacher makes a point to tell me how important it is.

The level of practicality my mother instilled in me is surprisingly high. I often get strange looks from my friends when I estimate that a yard of fabric stretches from my collarbone to my fingertips or when I tell them that eggs both act as a coagulant and make your cake fluffy: *why do you know this?* they ask, and then I give them the look. “Oh, your mom.” She's a technically good seamstress, a great cook, a decent gardener, and an excellent mother: I've learned a few things.

My mother once said to me, at the failure of yet another relationship, “I'm sorry I never taught you to use your womanly wiles,” at which I laughed uproariously. Neither she nor I *have* womanly wiles. It's just not in us. We're not flirtatious, we're not the best-built, and we're fine with that. At least I am, and I told her so. I told her I'd much rather know how to make preserves and what cognates we share with Spanish.

So maybe I held on to cable splicing because my overactive imagination made me worry I'd have to know something about bombs one day, but maybe I remember it today because it was not only strange, but obviously practical.

Though sometimes I wish I knew how to apply eyeliner.