

Men Without Paint

Look out America, it's Home Improvement Backlash.

By H. MICHAEL BAILEY NEW YORK

SHE HAD STARS IN HER EYES AS she walked down the aisle to take her vows. The award winning architect and home builder she had worked with, idolized, and fell in love with was about to hand her his heart.

Four years later, Judith Spackleman has tears instead of stars, pain instead of bliss. "I thought John was a perfect match for me", she said. "We both had dreams of living in the perfect house, one that we would jointly put our visions into. Instead he's turned into this irrational man suddenly rejecting everything he ever believed in and worked for. I'm utterly flabbergasted, stunned and emotionally shot."

In a general sense what's happened to John and Judith isn't that unusual. A couple meet, fall in love and get married, then sadly break up after discovering intolerable differences down the road. It's not unusual, except in the case of John

and Judith Spackleman.

It seems that John had an epiphany, "an unlayering of my life" as he put it. "One morning I woke up, stared at the ceiling and decided I had to throw my life into complete reverse - full throttle, top speed backwards! I decided to stop painting, stop improving, and stop maintaining the old Victorian house that Judith and I lived in."

That was three years ago when this hopeful couple had finally saved enough money to begin the full scale renovation the 150 year old landmark so desperately needed. At least that's what most people

would say. Not John Spackleman.

What John decided as a result of his morning revelation was that anything and everything, animate and inanimate should be left alone to exist without any adulteration, alteration, modification or renovation to its natural aging process. Got it? Judith Spackleman didn't. In fact, while Judith whimsically played along with John she set out buying paint and plaster to start the work on her own.

"Of course I didn't take him seriously," she said. "I could barely keep a straight face. I remember standing in the kitchen in my



HOUSE OF A DIFFERENT COLOR: John Spackleman says waking up to the peeling paint of his ceiling reminds him of his own mortality and inspires his best writing.



EYES OF THE BEHOLDER: Judith Spackleman (top, left) says her husband's obsession forced her to relive painful memories as a child of squatters. **WE HAVE FEELINGS TOO:** Spackleman support groups (above, right) say they're misunderstood but they continue to disrupt public restoration projects.

painter's pants and cap, holding a huge trowel of plaster. He was going on about how I was distorting life's true beauty. I burst out laughing and dropped the whole load on the stovetop."

Judith had no idea how committed John was to his new philosophy. Her attempts to spur the renovation proved fruitless. There was no way she could conquer this 18 room project alone. Finally she decided to invest her squirreled away savings on a crew of contractors. That's when the trouble started.

Just as their truck pulled up John bulldozed over his wife, reeled out the front door and pumped thirty rounds of buckshot at his target. "I had reached my fever pitch," he said. "They were the absolute enemy and had to be dealt with like the real threat that they were."

Judith was shocked into the nightmarish reality of a dangerously possessed husband. "I tried to

hang on," she said through choked tears. "But everything was falling apart. The walls were crumbling from top to bottom. It got so bad that I started to regress into my very sad childhood. My parents

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John Spackleman

could barely feed me let alone paint the walls. I didn't ever want to feel that pain again."

Her husband reacts like a man answering to a higher calling. "I feel bad for Judith, but she needs to respect my experience of rebirth. Aging is a natural part of life and paint is no exception. We must embrace the process, not run from it, not cover it up."

He now writes full time about

his personal vision, hoping to pass the word to the as yet unenlightened. His recently self-published book, *Stucco, It's Not The Answer* is finding some empathetic ears.

Small pockets of supporters mostly rural have begun to spring up. All are men and all have a zeal hauntingly similar to Spackleman's. Although loosely organized and largely underground these groups have slowly developed a militant profile in the name of furthering their cause. Arrests are not uncommon.

One small group which includes a father and his twelve year old son assertively states that John's philosophy is long overdue and worth any risk to spread its message. "We've been abandoned by our families and community," its leader says, "but we are building a new family that will rise up and make its mark against all the evils of renovation. Our time has come!"

Spackleman is reticent about militant subversity admitting he was out of control when he attacked the contractors but he is still driven to get his point across. During a recent speech he persuad-

***A class action law suit
against Sherwin
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Moore, and Dutch Boy to
tie up the courts.***

ed 200 blacklisted union contractors to file a class action law suit against Sherwin Williams, Benjamin Moore and Dutch Boy Paints just to tie up the courts.

Meanwhile Judith has been able to patch together a new life without John or the Victorian house. "He was everything I ever wanted in a man but it all got stripped away. Now he's just a shell of himself."

Not to John Spackleman. In his eyes he has broken through the shell and peeled away all the old layers that camouflaged his former life. He designs a single mission now - to create an echoing sound from work sites across the country: the sound of paint brushes hitting the ground. ■

CORRECTION

A story in the August issue about Idaho couples starting ritual sacrifice groups incorrectly stated the origins of their development. The first organized group was created by Harold and Patti Ann Gristleman at the Burger Barn Drive-In off Route 46, not in Tex Phelps' garage.

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