

Pelhams Puppets

One shilling a gross. That's what Pelham Puppets paid Mum for homework. That's 1d (one old penny) for 12 hands or feet. I remember Mum was really pleased when she got a job doing homework for Pelham Puppets. We needed more money so she told us we were going to make puppets.

When I got back from school today there were 2 hard red plastic crates on the dining room table. Mum showed me and Mark what the delivery man had shown her and said we would all be helping out with scraping the hands or feet. She picked up a small wooden handled knife, then one of the little hands. She carefully trimmed the clay like seam from around the hand, being extra careful when scraping in between the thumb and fingers. She said we had to do them carefully but quite quickly. If we waited too long then the clay would be too hard to scrape.

If a hand got broken, the thumb broke off really easily, then we had to put the broken ones in a separate box. It was OK for a couple to break but not too many, if too many got broken then they wouldn't deliver any more and Mum wouldn't get paid.

Mum said we'd have tea and then get started. I laid the table whilst Mum made scrambled eggs and baked beans. I don't like scrambled eggs and beans together so I just have beans when we have that meal for tea. Beans on toast - one of my favourites. After we had eaten Mark cleared the table, Mum washed up and I dried and put the dishes away.

Now time for work. I felt quite excited, we were making puppets and we would have more money, Mum said we might even be able to get a new three piece suite. Ours has holes in the arms where the foam pokes through, it's hard not to pick at the holes and make them bigger – sometimes without even realising you are doing it.

Me and Mark sat at the table. Mum put the crates on the table. One was full of hands and one was empty, that's where we had to put the hands when we had scraped them. There was a small cardboard box for any broken ones. We picked up a knife each, the man had left 4, and then started to scrape the extra clay away from the little hands. Mum had put 3 into the empty box and me and Mark were still on our first one. Mark nearly got his first one done then the thumb broke off. I started to laugh at Mark, holding up the hand with no thumb, I didn't look properly at what I was doing and the thumb broke off mine too. Mum said "Don't worry, just put them in that box, but be more careful next time".

We tried another one. I showed Mum the one I had done, she said it was good. Mark showed her his, she said it was good too but he had forgotten to scrape between the thumb and fingers, it looked weird, like a duck's foot. Mark scraped down the thumb and it fell off again. Me and Mark started laughing again, Mum didn't laugh. She looked quite upset, "Don't keep doing that", she said, "if you break too many we won't be allowed to do any more".

Mark just couldn't do it properly, every one he did broke. Mum told him to get down from the table, he wasn't allowed to help any more. He looked quite happy and went down the car park to play with the boys.

I felt very clever that I could scrape the hands properly. We did it for ages. It was OK but the box of hands looked creepy, all those webbed hands waiting for their thumbs to be shaped. The bits of clay made a right mess all over the table and some fell on to the floor. It looked like bits of pastry dough all over the place. It had a funny smell too. My hands were all white and sticky, the handle of the knife was covered in the clay too. We had to keep scraping the edge of the blade on the edge of the box to wipe it clean.

This was boring. We were nearly half way through the crate but I didn't want to do any more. Mum said we'd stop for tonight as it was nearly 8.30, my bedtime.

Mum said if we keep going like this then the man might leave an extra crate next time, or even some feet.

I don't really want him to leave any more, one shilling doesn't sound very much for a gross. It's very messy and boring.

The holes in the sofa don't even notice when the blanket is pulled straight.

I think I'll get a paper round instead.