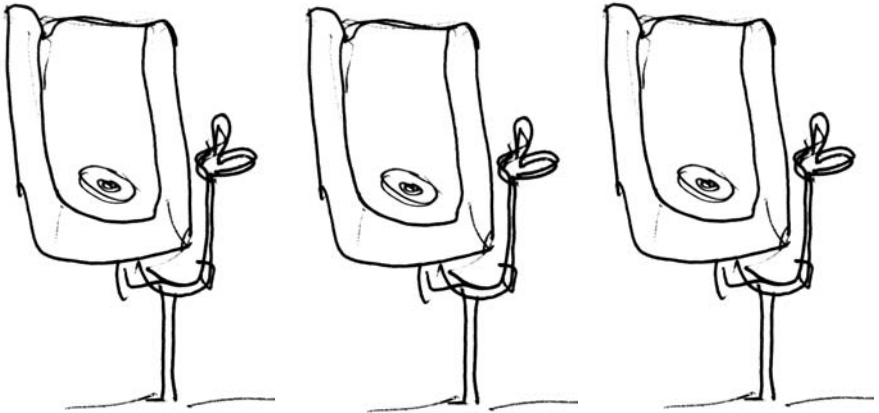


THE MEN'S ROOM

Observations from the last stall

by Jorge Cortés



Restroom etiquette is something that we tend to keep private and devoid as topic of any conversation. What happens in the bathroom is unspeakable because to speak of it is to break with the general rules of etiquette. What is it about comparing notes on taking dumps or leaks that has been so taboo? So much so that it would make most older folk recoil in disgust to this day? After all, it's a natural human function...

With art shows such as FLUSH, it is apparent that open discussion of this subject is finally getting its due. What once was an act performed by merely squatting wherever you stood — to digging a hole — to taking a walk to the outhouse — to its place today in the smallest room of every home, has now reached the walls, floors and kitchen of this fine house, aMuse Manor.

My part in this follows suit by making a few remarks over what I see in the public john. Below you will find a few brief notes set in specific categories on some experiences, observations, and inquiries that have all taken place in the variety of men's public restrooms. This may turn out to be a worthy revelation to all those women who wonder what it's like for the other gender or, more likely, a testimonial to my depraved and skewed perception. You be the judge.

The Urinal

A quick glance at the average male at a urinal looks like this: The man is poised at the lip of the urinal, legs slightly apart, staring straight ahead at a tiled wall that is just inches from his nose. Everyone looks straight ahead at the wall with the occasional look below at the work-in-progress. The act is

expedient, clocking in at about a minute, culminating in a few “shakings” for sanitary purposes. (On history’s timeline, someone in decades past decided that it was ok for guys to huddle around this strange device, huddled closely together, with Johnson in plain view.)

It is a very public act. Consider the “pissing trough.” Any major sports stadium has them as a standard. It is one of the last vestiges of depression-era provisioning: Forty-or-so men pissing in a metallic gutter, standing single file across a lengthy wall. What a sight. While very efficient when dealing with the large groups, the discomfort level among the cross-section of dads, grandpas, brothers, friends, is palpable.

Now, go to a public park’s urinals (or toilets for that matter) and you will see discomfort escalate into abhorrence with a tinge of visible dry-heaving. Because of this, I have always considered that those poor saps who have to clean these lavatories are the bravest of humans and should be making a six-figure salary. I digress....

I don’t think men will ever be at ease in front of a urinal. Having to stand so closely to another person invades space. It’s like speaking in front of a large crowd without a podium. There is nothing between you and the crowd. Be thankful, women!

The Stall

To be forthright, my knowledge of the stall experience is more than abundant. For many years now, I’ve had the misfortune of being cursed with the need to go potty every time I’m away from home. What this means is that I’m the person who takes countless treks to the port-a-potty at any outdoor

event, I’m the one with the stomach ache that screams for the toilet in the middle of an important ceremony, I’m the one racing around the mall hastened to find the one bathroom in the whole goddamn place, and I’m the one unloading in the unholy of shitholes in the dive bar at 1a.m. These, my friends, are my credentials -and so it goes...

Nothing can be more horrific than what may lurk in a public restroom’s stall. There is no warning and there is no way of knowing unless you take a look at what is before you. You are forced to step into that stall and make sure someone didn’t clog the toilet or simply didn’t flush. Many times I’ve found myself aghast at what I’ve stumbled across in a stall. It comes in unique shapes: Sometimes it looks like the Sagrada Familia in Barcelona, other times because of the “TP” factor; a soiled turban, and if you are very unlucky, Jackson Pollock’s number 5. I would imagine that this crosses over into the ladies room to some degree but the level that this happens in a men’s room is much too often. The smell is almost guaranteed to be suffocating in these situations, wafting from one stall to the other at times. Good lord— the inhumanity! Men are indeed pigs.

These disconcerting circumstances are part of the many drawbacks of public defecation. I know many folk who will do anything in their power to avoid taking a shit in a public toilet. On the other hand, the disconcerting circumstance might be a product of your own making, if you catch my drift. Can you think of anything worse than having to run into a busy restroom when you have “The runs?” The pain you may feel is nothing compared to the embarrassment that ensues with the cacophony of sound that spews forth from your rectum. While rare, “the runs in a stall” does happen a few times in a

man's life. The butt trumpet's improvisational style when it comes to diarrhea will forever be imprinted on your mind if it took place in a crowded public restroom.

The Senior

The mention of seniors here is primarily done to applaud them. So what, if 10-minute pisses and/or an unabashed inclination towards flatulence at the urinal are par for the course among the elderly. And yes, they are usually weary and have a tendency to slow the whole mechanics of the bathroom down by a few minutes. But one should point out that these are seasoned veterans. They are to be respected as the most experienced of the lot. They've been doing it for over sixty years, honing down their pace, execution, and style. A senior can do no wrong in the restroom. They are the most graceful and good-mannered of us all. And for this I tip my hat.

With that in mind, herein lies a burning question: Are the habits of the older men a result of age-old customs or simply biological happenstance due every male in their twilight years? I don't know the answer to this question entirely. I do lean towards learned rather than natural behavior. So it's the younger generations I think, that have made the public restroom a veritable cesspool - and no one is more to blame than the kids....

The Father and Son

Many a time have I seen a prepubescent male trotting out of a stall, yelling, laughing or the very worst; crying — disturbing what at home would have certainly been a relaxing squat on the can. Nothing is more volatile and unpredictable than a child in a public restroom. Children are anarchic in the bathroom. Regardless of the father or guardian that has accompanied the little unrefined pissant, I can attest to at least a handful of occasions when I've found myself halfway through number 2 when



a child is on hands and knees looking at me from under the stall.

The real problem with children goes beyond their scurrying around or invading the little privacy you have in a toilet. Their presence guarantees an absolute mess. Chances are that the clogged toilet you just walked into was the handiwork of a small child. Who else would toss an entire roll of toilet paper into the toilet? Who else would miss the toilet in the midst of poo-pooing? And who else would stick their hand in anything that flushes? Fuckin' kids I tell you.

The Hand wash

Lastly, I wish to end here with a question for the men; a question that challenges most men's sense of cleanliness. I've asked a few males in the past and have gotten no real answers. Here it is:

Why is it that men don't wash their hands before they urinate - only after?

Think about it. A man MUST hold his organ.

Now consider all the unhygienic things a person touches, holds.

White-out, ink, plain old dirt, chili, cocaine, tar, hair dye, cat hair, putty, pizza sauce, snot. These are just a few of the infinite number of contaminants that may end up on you schlong via your hands. I have lost sleep over this one and have written to the Surgeon General over the issue but still await a response. With this I leave you and I ask of you again, think about it.

The organizers of FLUSH thank you for attending the show.

We also request that you kindly pee in the bathroom and not outside. We want to keep our neighbors, and the Board of Health, happy. Here's a tip for those who find it difficult to wait in line: Stand in line before you really, *really* have to pee so that you're ready by the time it's your turn. Besides, the bathroom line is at the center of the party. As you stand there patiently waiting, you get to interact with everyone walking by.

