

Battle of the Alimentary Canal

Jerry Woodfill



It had to be one of those “when in the course of human events” kind of things, an assignment by Highland High’s grid-iron coach to teach his sophomore biology class. Since I only played basketball, he could deal with coaching duties while I taught.

Yet from earliest childhood, I’d known my true academic forte was not biology but *scatology*. The word has a pair of dictionary meanings. I’d like to assign the first to my gift, the study of excrement, but that second meaning, is, perhaps, the more appropriate – that is, interest or treatment of obscene matters, esp. in literature. To that end is composed the following recollection from an experience in the Lincoln Lion’s boys restroom more than a half century past:

* * * * *

The sign said, “Wash Your Hands.”

No one could miss it. It was posted on the

exit side of every bathroom door in the school house. Remarkably, I’d only noticed it after being assigned the demonstration of urination/defecation hand washing. This was the era of extreme germ warfare, when the mere contact with a contaminated playground swing might lead to polio. Nevertheless, my deft antiseptic hand cleansing demo was artful. It would have done an OR nurse proud prior to open heart surgery. I displayed microscopic slide drawings showing all manner of bacteria and fecal contagion deposited on unwashed hands, followed by, of course, the *Louie* Pasteur award winning post-wash-photo.

Statistics gathered from surveys and surveillance systems had one out of three defecators ignoring the restroom sign. Such failings were ominous. My schoolmates were virtually shaking hands with someone’s private parts. Additionally, the hand-shaker’s wiping malfunctions left fecal matter on fingers. Rather than being flushed into the commode’s void, his victim’s hands became toilet paper.

I consulted a bookish friend about an invention to deal with the “unclean” of Lincoln Grade School. Perhaps, we might enter our invention in this year’s science fair. Besides, the device was sure to instill hand-washing resolve. The concept dealt with an alarm system. Failure to run tap water after a toilet’s flushing sound triggered the device. The moment the toilet flushed, a timer started a launch-rocket-like count down.

The sucking whooshing toilet bowl discharges had a distinctive audio signature. An electronic noise discriminator (one of us hiding in

an adjacent stall) recognized such sounds. It launched the count.

With a stop-watch bought at Millikan’s Sporting Goods, we timed the hand-sink-washing process, i.e., from toilet flush, user mount up, pants pull-up, re-zip-up, belt-up, stall open-up, and finally, hand clean-up. Again, a unique wash basin tap water sound reset our counter, the stop-watch. Elapsed time of ten seconds from toilet flush would activate the alarm if not reset. After a number of simulated runs, the alarm time was set for twenty seconds.

But technology of the 1950s posed a handicap. No Radio Shacks with myriads of electronic contraband imported from the foreign shores of Taiwan and Singapore existed to automate our contrivance. We would have to make do with Beard’s Hardware Store *gadgetry*.

Our preliminary design was begun employing a door-bell button mechanism cleverly wired to the toilet’s float lever. From there bell wire was dressed down behind the stall then run along the wall, and finally up into the light fixture over the sink. Hidden within the overhead apparatus would be our timer with a battery to activate an alarm.

But what might our alarm be? An audio siren, i.e., my Schwinn Panther bicycle horn? A scolding voice intoning the statement, “Please return to the sink your hands are unclean?” Perhaps, a red light flashing above the mirror over the wash basin might serve well? The sound of tap water would extinguish it. But there was a better way. Entering the boy’s restroom one morning to wash my hands led to the discovery.

The gravest among the hand wash abusers nested either immediately after breakfast or lunch, i.e., a *b.m.* in the a.m. or p.m. (We were great on acronyms. B.M. stands for bowel movement.) Somehow, a belt busting breakfast or belly bloating lunch launched swollen bowels into warfare of the alimentary canal. Therefore, horrible noises blared into the boy's room from the far stall on the left. My cup rinsing was a whisper in comparison. The decibel din sounded like World War II with mortar rounds firing and depth charges dropping into seas below.

Ghastly poison gases accompanied the half foot olive-drab torpedoes. Such fumes were more acrid than any mustard gas carried down-wind from the trenches of World War One. However, the carnage of this battle included the moans of defecation, grunts akin to extracting a bullet imbedded in flesh. Perhaps, it was hemorrhoids, piles, an inflamed urethra, enlarged prostrate or constricted anus. My sympathy for this male combatant arose as the battle raged.

Surely, I must offer condolences when my Lincoln School warrior emerged from his foxhole.

I paused awaiting his exit. Certainly, in light of the grossness of his combat, those hands, devoted to removing refuse from the field of battle, would be cleansed. At that time, my well-wishes would be voiced toward the embattled soldier at the adjacent sink.

Thinking about our alarm system and the timed events, I heard the flush, the pants pull-up, the up-zippering, the re-belted, the stall unlatching as the count preceded to twenty seconds. At the count of twenty, I looked into the mirror as the

washroom warrior passed behind me, through the exit door, ignoring the HAND WASH sign. He had entered the general population of Lincoln Grade School as a Typhoid *Marty*, an unclean leper, a contagion carrier. His handshake would deposit bodily wastes on every innocent victim greeted with a smile and extended hand.

"Why hadn't I yelled at him? Wash your hands!"

Perhaps, knowing he'd been found out, embarrassment would mend his disgusting ways. Having a witness to his nefarious act of restroom depravity was the answer. No longer would he remain incognito among a caste of untouchables, the UNCLEAN of our proud school.

This led to my epiphany, the solution: *a listing of such violators.* Yes, I'd post a notice, not on the inside of the restroom door but on the outside. A sign could do it all...no alarm needed!

**FAIL TO WASH YOUR HANDS LEAVING,
AND YOU'LL BE LISTED BELOW.
MAKE MY DAY!
"The Shadow Knows."**

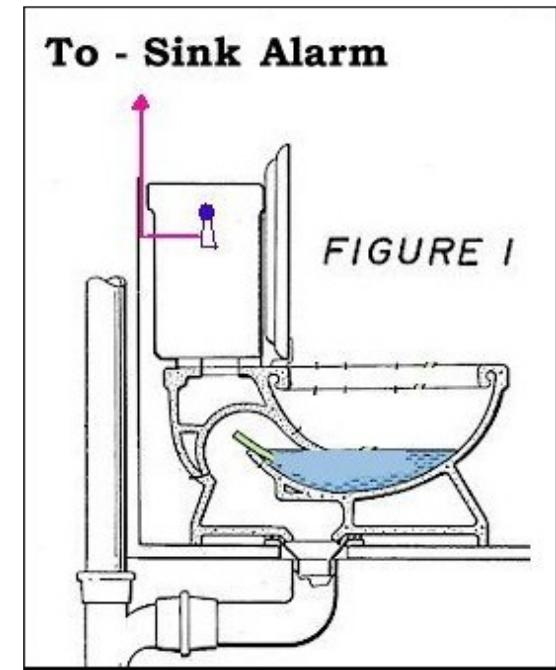
	Name	Date/Time
1.	_____	_____
2.	_____	_____
3.	_____	_____

Warning!
1st offense, only date and time will be listed.
2nd offense, your initials will be listed.
3rd offense earns a full name inscription

If you are so disposed, post the sign above. It just might work!

However, our project was never to become the gold medal winner of the Lincoln Grade School science fair.

But who knows how many lives might have been rescued from the ravages of polio had it been employed not only in the halls of Highland, Hammond, and Hessville grade schools but across America? Yes, indeed, Jonas Salk would have been proud!



The Never Patented Handwashing Enforcer
Invention Design
(circa 1953)

The Battle of the Alimentary Canal Comprehension Questions

(Enter answers on the line to left of each question.)

- _____ 1. Jerry's tone compares the bathroom to:
a. Garden of Eden
b. Roman Spa
c. WWI and WWII
d. hospital operating room
- _____ 2. Jerry infers that unwashed hands are_?
a. unsuitable for writing themes
b. the sign of a macho-man
c. simply a nuisance
d. carriers of polio germs
- _____ 3. Jerry's invention used _____?
a. Radio Shack electronic parts
b. A NASA gas detector
c. Army surplus gadgets
d. parts from a hardware store
- _____ 4. Jerry's conducted a washroom test?
(T)rue or (F)alse.
- _____ 5. Jerry entered his invention in _____.

- a. Lincoln Grade School Science Fair
b. the national patent registry
c. Mr. Wizard's science show
d. a scientific study of scatology
e. none of the above

- _____ 6. Scatology is the study of ____?
a. Biology
b. particle physics
c. excrement
d. cats who scat

- _____ 7. What did Jerry *not* think about the boy he heard in the bathroom?
a. "felt his pain", sympathized with him
b. likened him to a brave soldier
c. he might have a medical flaw
d. it was actually the custodian

- _____ 8. What radio show did Jerry think of?
a. *Rin Tin Tin*
b. *Crime Does Not Pay*
c. *War Stories*
d. *The Shadow*

- _____ 9. Which disease was not mentioned?
a. typhoid

- b. hemorrhoids
c. polio
d. diarrhea

- _____ 10. How did Jerry time his alarm?
a. interviewing friends
b. using himself as a test case
c. consulting a gastroenterologist
d. hiding in a stall with a stopwatch

- _____ 11. Jerry compared defecation to _____?
a. depth charges and torpedoes
b. a Humpty Dumpty rhyme
c. a teacher he despised
d. a defector (a deserter, traitor)

- _____ 12. Why did Jerry want the device?
a. it would make him famous
b. to win a science fair award
c. to prevent disease
d. to embarrass classmates

- _____ 13. What did the stall sitter do?
a. failed to flush the toilet
b. collapsed on the floor
c. failed to wash his hands
d. studied for a spelling test

- _____ 14. What is meant by B.M. in the A.M.?
a. Billy Morgan in his Auto-Mobile

- b. Beginning Math and Arithmetic
- c. after breakfast scatology
- d. a belt-busting morning breakfast

- _____ 15. Jerry's compared unwashed hands to _?
- a. shaking hands with toilet paper
 - b. shaking hands with fecal matter
 - c. shaking hands with polio germs
 - d. all of the above

- _____ 16. What **was not** considered as an alarm?
- a. his Schwinn bike horn
 - b. a flashing red light
 - c. a scolding voice
 - d. a sign posted on the door

- _____ 17. What was Jerry's handwashing *enforcer*?
- a. class bully standing by the sink
 - b. the alarm mechanism
 - c. a poster revealing abusers
 - d. restroom agent spying on the *unwashed*

- _____ 18. How would Jerry's alarm work?
- a. using flushing and washing signals
 - b. an odor detector in the stalls
 - c. door-bell button on soap dispenser
 - d. recoil of a spring-loaded toilet seat

- _____ 19. Why did the stricken toilet sitter enrage Jerry ?
- a. he knew his hands were disgustingly filthy yet he failed to wash them
 - b. Jerry was sorry for the sitter
 - c. the sitter helped serve lunches
 - d. he'd seen the sitter pick his nose

- _____ 20. What resulted from Jerry's idea?
- a. he received the Jonas Salk award
 - b. nothing
 - c. this story will make others think about bathroom handwashing
 - d. the story sickens readers
 - e. c. and d.

The Battle of the Alimentary Canal Vocabulary List

<u>Word</u>	<u>Synonym</u>
1. deft	skillful
2. commode	toilet
3. discriminator	selection device
4. myriad	innumerable
5. decibel	measure of sound
6. din	loud discordant noise
7. alimentary canal	entire body food tube
8. defecation	waste elimination
9. contrivance	mechanical device
10. gadgetry	crude mechanisms
11. scatology	study of excrement
12. fecal	pertaining to body waste
13. carnage	slain flesh
14. pile	single hemorrhoid
15. hemorrhoids	sores
16. urethra	bladder tube
17. prostrate	gland
18. typhoid	communicable disease
19. incognito	disguised
20. epiphany	divine revelation

