

OUTHOUSE USERS KNEW HOW TO GIVE IT THE OL' ONE-TWO

September 4, 2001

My topic this week is on a very important subject. Its significance was brought home to our household most recently by both our immediate needs and a suggestion from a faithful reader.

It started with septic tanks and the drain system inherent with them. They are an indispensable requirement of all those beyond the reach of municipal sewer facilities.

This is particularly true of business establishments and one local restaurant is well aware of the ramifications of treating it lightly. Their attention to detail is evident in every facet of their operation, which is tested by one of the largest number of customers in the area. A sign in the rest room reminds those who may not be aware of the special care demanded of septic systems:

**All of us folks with septic tanks
Give to you our heartfelt thanks
For putting nothing in the pot
That isn't guaranteed to rot.
Kleenex is bad, matchsticks, too
Cigarette butts are strictly taboo.
No plastics, please, use the basket
There's a darn good reason why we ask it!**

My faithful reader, who is much younger but owns an old traditional camp, still has no other alternative than the time-honored outhouse. He asked me if I was old enough to remember when they were commonplace or if I experienced the travails of one on a regular basis. My answer to both was in the affirmative.

In the '30's when I was a tad, we still had an outhouse and the accompanying chamber pots and vessels. When we boys became old enough to be trusted not to spill them, the daily chore of emptying them became a part of our regular chores.

When it was the other guy's duty, I would gleefully cry out, "Man the vessels, Admiral"! Needless to say, to avoid retaliation I became as unobtrusive as possible when it was my turn.

In cold weather we had to gain special permission to use the inside facilities to do number two. That condition was strictly taboo when the weather was clement. One of my fondest memories was the trouble my brother Cliff got into when he tried to circumvent the rule. He threw the evidence out our upstairs bedroom window, forgetting that our parent's room was directly below and their window was open.

Speaking of number one and two, I recall being obliged to designate which function we wished to perform when seeking permission from the teacher to do so. I still recall a first grade experience of unabashedly standing in front of Mrs. Barker to have the back flap on my pants unbuttoned and re-buttoned to and from the bathroom. Incidentally, our school did have modern facilities, unlike many of the country schools still prevalent in those days.

Long after many households became modernized, they still maintained the old reliable outhouse until long after the modern version had proven its worth. They provided great sport on Halloween for the local boys and many a prank was enacted due

to their location and vulnerability. Many of the more elaborate edifices were converted to tool or storage sheds and served many more years of useful service.

One of the more useful purposes I had planned for one old decrepit model fizzled out before I had a chance to implement its conversion to another use.

The forest rangers were in a dispute with the powers-that-be over mandating a directional sign to our homes in which most of us were required to maintain an office. I was the committee chairman for the rangers and as a way of protest, I planned to locate my office to the old outhouse. Fortunately for the State, they promoted me to District Ranger for whom they provided offices.

There are a multitude of stories and tales that can be told based on the once-popular outhouse. One was the remark an old and dear backwoods friend made in reference to the hordes of flies swarming over the table at lunchtime: "Don't mind these flies, boys, they will head back to the outhouse after we finish dinner".