

Peeing in the Woods  
by  
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"We're going to get in trouble."

"Are not."

"Yes, we are. We're not supposed to pee outside."

"We can too."

"If you do, I'll tell."

"No you won't, or I'll pee on *you*," and I was dead serious in that regard. Jennifer wasn't going to be telling anyone.

"It's okay, Jenny. I do it all the time," Tina's voice chimed in. She was the eldest at about six and almost always had the last say in the matter. "Paul, you have to pee over there," she added indicating the other side of the tree. I was too happy to argue.

We were conspiring inside a stand of three large pines which sat behind my house. They were large and full all the way to the bottom, providing the perfect cover for this activity. The smell of fresh pine sap has an invigorating quality about it as the breeze wraps it around the area. Perhaps it was the stimulation of the pine scent which had set this wild idea in our heads.

This was my first time peeing outside that I can still remember, and I do remember it quite vividly. The thrill of doing something naughty, the wet thud and paddle of pee hitting dirt and pine needles, the fresh breeze hitting skin which normally knew only stagnant air, all of this combined with the knowledge that girls were doing the same on the other side seemed to release a type of elixir which spread from my innermost organs to the pores on my skin. I was young anyway, five I think, but this seemed to bring out even more of my youth. So how could such a joyous memory be overrun with feelings of awkwardness and loathing when I first saw the men at Chicken do pretty much the same thing fourteen years later?

By some miracle from the graces of God, Otis and I managed to make the trip from Fairbanks to Chicken in one piece. Somehow, Otis's beer consumption over the eight hour period had managed not to affect his driving ability. And somehow, I had not lost my mind during that period of time. Actually, I felt a deep connection with Otis. He was one of my last links to Fairbanks, my only shelter now that we were on a pit stop to a road that led nowhere at the edge of Alaska. We had been very warmly greeted by Greg and Sue when we arrived, and it did not take long for me to start to feel like I was going to fit in.

Susan and Greg's cabin and the area surrounding make up, in my opinion, the most impressive sight to be found in Chicken. The cabin, built like a standard log constructed long-house, had an aura of newness about it. The logs from which it was constructed had the appearance of being freshly cut. They were stained in such a way that I was first afraid to touch the logs for fear of smudging them. It had several windows and doors that, when open, seemed to make no distinction between what was inside the cabin and its surroundings.

And the surroundings were impressive. I had arrived in early May, so the snow had not

quite receded from any shady area, yet little bits of grass, plentiful where there was no snow, could also be seen sneaking up through the icy whiteness. The birch trees were starting to bud, and we were in the perfect position to view it, as the cabin was situated at the top of a hill which overlooked the valley beneath it. Looking out from the hill I could see trees heading out forever, the river which cut the valley stayed invisible behind them.

Only two manmade structures could be seen from this height. To the left, Chicken's airfield lay cut out below, a sandy strip with ponds of water resting around it. To the right, the Taylor highway heading back towards Tok cut its awkward path among the trees on the surrounding hills. Yet nature seemed to surround this little island of human civilization, even from above. It has been my belief ever since this trip that the sky is bigger and bluer in Chicken than anywhere else in the world.

Still the cabin and the other nearby buildings, an office shed for Sue, a light colored guest cabin, and a fairly large, nice-looking outhouse, all added to the sense of a human oasis, a feeling of civility. So it took me by surprise when I saw Greg and Otis head over to a part of the outlook that was slightly concealed and expose themselves to nature.

I looked at the outhouse and then looked at them. I was a little bit confused, and decided upon the outhouse myself. But I was seriously drawn to that side of the cliff, and I have to wonder what that draw was exactly. I would succumb to that pull after a couple of days of trying to remain somewhat modern, but I would not feel comfortable with it until sometime later. I think I know why.

There is a desire to expose myself to nature which seems unexplainable. It is a yearning to set myself free, to take off the drudgery of the modern world and embrace the ancient and the young which are simultaneously bound in nature. It's to be a part of the air and the water and the earth. Chicken is not the first time that I felt the pull of this force.

One could try to rationalize my first remembered experience exposed to the outdoors as childish curiosity. But what about the times after that? Like when I went camping with my Boy Scout troop?

Camp Teetonka is the most magical place in the world for me. It was not the first place in which I went camping, nor will it be the last, but it is still very special to me. My first summer there was awful and ended in my parents picking me up after only two days due to a fever which I had quickly come down with. My second well more than made up for it.

The campsite of troop 312 was located right next to Wolf Lake. To get to it, one had to take a long dirt road that led from the entrance, through the main section of camp, down a steep hill, and ended at the boat house which sat one of the camp's beaches along the lake. One then turned into a stand of trees, I believe junipers, and quickly would find oneself in a tree-spotted grove.

This magical clearing was surrounded by ancient trees, even on the side of the lake where they formed only a thin barrier between us and the hushed lapping of the water. Several large trees which stood alone in the clearing filtered the sun from directly touching any place in the campsite except the farthest end. Like Chicken, there were only a few man-made devices around, but they were enough to remind us that we were to act at least somewhat civilized. A wooden roofed wash basin, whose water could be supplied by placing a water barrel above the faucets, sat near the main entrance to the site; a water fountain, whose pressure was supplied from some unseen source (perhaps the lake), stood awkwardly in the middle of the clearing like a stunted metal tree, and an outhouse made of old boards was thankfully placed down a wooden

path.

Still the nature of the area infected us, and for that entire week, I do not believe that a single one of us used the outhouse for anything except serious business. But why would one want to? The latrine was far from clean. Flies and other insects buzzed up and down the tin funnels which were supposed to serve as primitive urinals. Noxious odors wafted from the different holes' unseen depths. The wood surrounding was in some places stained and in all places saturated with the scent of human waste. But out of it, the breeze could flow unhindered and clean. The gentle swaying of the trees and the hush of their leaves dancing was not blunted by man-made walls. The rhythmic sounds of the lake were impossible not to answer.

A part of it may be the fact that young boys must rebel against any law, but all of us feel the need to rebel against our great modern advances now and again. One of the things which I adore about my parents' house is the medium sized window in their bathroom wall. It is made of a special glass which makes it impossible to see into when closed and is positioned on the house in such a way that it is difficult to see into even when open. Yet this blessed window, when opened, allows a cool, gentle breeze to play about the room. Relaxing, comforting, soft touches by angels make me feel even closer to nature. But even though I like how close that is to freedom, it still does not compare to the absolute release of being out in the woods.

While these men in Chicken were doing what was easiest at the time, they were also, in their own way, rebelling against the confines of civilization. They were rebelling against the stale porcelain, grimy bronze, and artificial air fresheners of modern bathrooms. It is possible to suffocate in not just those boxes over holes called outhouses, but even in the sterile, germ-reduced boxes over water-filled holes called restrooms.

Still, I could only look at them that first day with disgust. True, I had been slowly, well, *exposed* to this behavior during the drive with Otis, but that was different. There were no rest stops sometimes for hundreds of miles on that trip, and with Otis's intake of beer and mine of the Diet Coke he had brought along, we needed to stop every twenty minutes. So it was out of necessity that we had to make mud of the dusty Taylor highway. Here there was still the option of the outhouse, and it was a very clean outhouse for that matter.

I had only taken to peeing in the woods three days later, because myself and the other two male employees had been moved to what would become our residence that summer. It was a good quarter to a half mile to reach the nearest outhouse from our new living area. Laziness overpowered civility, and I began to take my nature calls out in the woods. But I remained uncomfortable for a while.

I suppose I felt dirty, or like I was doing something dirty. Maybe that would put me in the same situation as Adam when he suddenly realized he was standing around in the buff. I needed to cover my nakedness, even though the only person that would have seen was God. I am a product of the modern American civilization. This culture has enforced upon me the idea that natural functions are dirty ones. Sure, we have all the media to tell us to explore our bodies and not be ashamed of them, but they are always broken in by commercials for deodorant and

mouthwash, telling us that we are unattractive unless we cover ourselves up. We are dirty creatures who need the progresses of science to clean us up, these commercials insinuate. And we buy into it, literally.

This is not to say that we should publicly expose ourselves. I am a firm believer in the individual's right to privacy, especially in this delicate area. This act should be hidden not because it is dirty and we should be ashamed of it, but because it is a private matter.

Which brings up my dislike for public restrooms. We are herded into an unnatural box packed with complete strangers all made to feel publicly dirty. We have been told that we hide this act because it is dirty, yet we are exposing this "dirty" area in front of many people who are doing the same. All of us ashamed of our act, and afraid of the people who are not just next to us, but who have been there before us. No wonder the fear of getting AIDS by toilet seats and urinals had run so rampant.

I had finished peeing by the pine trees when curiosity forced me to see what the girls were doing. Tina had already finished and Jennifer had refused to participate, so there was nothing to see. We began to play again after we promised not to let our parents know about our experience. We were confident that no one but us would know, but that week my parents had the branches around the base of the pines cut so that a clear view could be seen from the kitchen window.

[It should be noted that, after reading this story, my mother informed me that she did not actually know about the incident, but had the lower branches removed "just in case."]