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Camp is Crap

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One effective way to remove the pain from a painfully embarrassing experience is to find the humor in it. Here's what you do: place yourself in the body of a neutral witness. Slip your feet inside their shoes and innocently wiggle your toes about. Then, once you've accomplished this, allow your essence to flow up through the hypothetical body and into the brain. Think *Invasion of the Body Snatchers* without the pods, it's easy. Really, in order to achieve significant psychological relief, force yourself inside the minds of those heartless, depraved, insensitive individuals who laughed at your expense when you accidentally shit yourself at 4H Camp. Then it all becomes humorous and less of a pain in the ass of your memory. Right?

I'm not exactly sure why I wanted to go in the first place. Maybe it was because my friend Elliott was going (or, rather, was being forced to go as part of his well-rounded Christian development) or because I was fascinated with tornadoes and debris or because the brochure offered fun, craft-oriented activities involving sheets of metal and multi-colored pipe cleaners. Or maybe it was the knock-off slip 'n slide set up on the side of a jagged mountain, er, smooth and pastoral hill that caught my attention. Nature trails, rain dances, homemade ice cream, watermelon, swimming pools--all things enticing to an

ignorant ten-year-old who had never spent more than a weekend away from home. Once the necessary paperwork was completed, a chore reserved for my apprehensive mother, I would be at camp for five days and nights, eating only three times a day. I would be away from the seclusion of my dimly-lit, Transylvanian bedroom, absent from the comfort of my stiff bottom bunk-bed, and denied the luxury of a private shower.

Allow me to digress and elaborate on this whole communal shower business to which I was unaware beforehand.¹ Truthfully, I didn't bathe the entire time I was at camp (unless you want to count the two occasions I reluctantly stuck my big toe into the bone-chilling water of the not-so-Olympic-sized pool; water which I'm certain must have been drained from an Arctic iceberg). How could I when the running gag was to sneak into the large, open bathroom in groups of four and yank open the cheap, flesh-colored nylon curtains to the dismay of the naked boy inside the shower stall? I mean, I was modest. I couldn't get comfortable with the threat of exposure and the thought of being caught, naked and wet, with my hand in the crack of my ass feverishly

1 Communal showering, a relatively modern form of Medieval torture, provides the male adolescent with an opportunity to realize that not all dicks are created equal, thus elevating one's self-consciousness or pride, whichever applies.

attempting to remove stray soap suds.

So, with the time I would've spent showering with my body covered in the corner of the stall (think Carrie White being stoned with tampons), I walked around the bustling campgrounds with Elliott, made crafty do-dads, and ritually popped my first round of harsh antibiotics due to a lovely case of strep throat I was trying to overcome. For five days.

It must have been about the third day of camp when the tragic event occurred. Elliott and I were walking back to the cabin from washing dishes at the cafeteria when I felt my bowels scream from within as if they had accidentally spilled and impaled themselves on a large, jagged nail. I stopped, instantly breaking out in a sweat of hot fear. I asked myself, *What do I need to do right now?* I held my breath for a moment, feeling every inch of intestine inside my body expand and contract, swell and release. Against my better judgment, I decided to keep walking and ignore what was happening inside my body. I could play it cool and make it to the bathroom without having to sprint like a gazelle. However, once my feet resumed their course, a fart blasted its way out from between my cheeks. Elliott immediately began to laugh. Farts always got a rise out of him, even if they were fake as in

a rip-roaring game of Make Me Laugh. I, however, knew that something was terribly wrong and terribly moist in my pants.

“Oh shit,” I said aloud. “I think I just crapped my pants.”

Elliott laughed even harder, his face red with heat and glee. Then, a momentary look of concern which could have been mistaken for an epileptic seizure seized his face as he looked me in the eye and said, “No you didn’t.”

“Yeah, I think I did,” I said to him with the naked trust that only the best of friends hold sacred. “I mean, maybe I didn’t, but I’m pretty sure I feel something mushy in there.”

His sagging, freckled face instantly lifted as he released an untamed wail. His head thrown back, arms lifted at his sides, hands limply dangling at his face, he was Stimpie in top form.

“It’s not funny, man! I’m sick!” I shouted as I began to mechanically strut toward the cabin.

How I handled this stinky situation from that point seemed quite reasonable to me, given the circumstances. I casually walked into the vacated cabin, took a clean pair of underwear from my bag, and slipped into one of the shower stalls to make the switch. Luckily the Naked Brigade was off duty for a

while, probably crawling through the air ducts in the girls' cabins with cheap Halloween masks from Wal-Mart. They certainly would've gotten an added bonus had they barged in on me. I tossed the soiled pair of wears into the trash and made my way back to the assembly hall where some new-age hippy lesbian holding a candle talked about the life of a penny for two hours while my undies grew stale in the cabin.

When I returned from the emotionally-riveting speech, now with a deeper appreciation for insignificant American currency, all hell had broken loose. There in the hallway, like a lower-lip herpe, was my dirty pair of underwear, exhumed from the wastebasket, with big, stupid Mean Kid Isuckalot (a.k.a. Drew) standing over them, laughing hysterically and waving them about as they dangled from the end of a flimsy tree limb. I could hear laughter coming from the others who had returned from the assembly in the next room.

The moment was surreal in the most frightening of ways: extreme close up of Bully Bastard's wrinkled, freckled face, laughing in warped, demonic tape speed, branch rising in the left portion of the frame, underwear steadily coming into

focus. Cut to my face as my frightened eyes slowly lift from the floor to Heaven above (*God, why?!*), mouth agape, hands rising to my cheeks, fingernails leaving four bright red streaks as gravity pulls them downward. All of this in slow motion, of course. Though that's how the initial reaction should have occurred (for it was worthy of an Academy Award), I was frozen. The only thing I could do was stand there in the doorway, eyes focused in on my name written on the elastic band of the ruined Fruit of the Dooms. Thanks, Mom.

Petrified, I watched as my dirty drawers were slung across the hallway. It didn't occur to me then, but now when I ponder over this event from time to time, especially in moments of panic or rage or constipation, I think to myself, *What kind of a sick kid would do this sort of thing--wander into the bathroom, probably to jerk off between crafts, investigate the contents of the trashcan, and willingly remove a soiled pair of underwear for amusement?* I mean, I did many years ago walk in on a pre-school colleague smearing shit all over his forehead in the bathroom for no apparent reason. Perhaps this was the same boy, now fat and mean and on his way straight to the fiery furnace of Hell.

Snapping out of my paralysis, I stomped down the hallway, carefully picked

up the briefs, and headed for the door on the opposite end which led to the outside of the cabin, keeping my head down and dismissing Drew for a badly-crafted statue covered in bird shit. I did my best to remain calm and collected despite the laughter, but that effort was shot to hell as I lost all composure in a moment of desperation and flung the ruined pair of underwear over the chain-link fence. Unfortunately, they didn't make it to the ground on the opposite side. Instead, they got caught on a protruding piece of metal near the top of the fence, an all-too-perfect fuck up to enhance and prolong the experience. Great. Now my crusty pair of briefs would blow in the summer breeze like one of those bright, tacky yard flags old ladies use to welcome the holidays.

Feeling utterly defeated, I shoved past the crowd of chuckling onlookers and walked back inside, hating everyone and hoping they'd die instantly or get eaten by the penny-loving lesbo at the assembly hall. I crawled into bed like a poisonous vapor and pulled the covers over my head. The shame was intense and so was the remnant anger in my disgruntled bowels. Unable to seek the proper relief, I somehow managed to fall asleep and stifle the overwhelming embarrassment while contemplating the many possible ways I could destroy

Drew's life forever.

Luckily for me, the gods had been sated at my expense and chose to dump on some other poor soul that night. I awoke to the sound of laughter, at first thinking Drew had perhaps constructed some sort of sock puppet with my underwear and was putting on a show. Then I realized the laughter was not intended for me. I breathed a heavy sigh of relief as I was informed that the weird bony kid had gotten his dick stuck in a hole in the wall and was hyperventilating.

I returned from my stay at camp with relatively little scarring. Though they sympathized, my parents found the story to be quite humorous and didn't mind exploiting my tribulations to their friends at work.

"Oh, come on. It's funny! You gotta laugh at yourself to make it less serious. I've shit myself plenty of times!"

Once again, thanks Mom.

My dad opted for a more pictorial approach at comfort. One day while lounging in my room, basking in the glow of a black light, he opened my bedroom door after working away at the grime on the tires of his truck. With a smile on his face, he lifted a pair of greasy briefs from his back pocket, held them out, and said, "Hey, they mailed your underwear home from camp."

Thanks, Dad.