

Getting to the Heart of the Matter

Many moons ago I was awakened to a monstrous rapping on the bedroom door, followed by the phrase: “Get your lazy culo out da bed der boy.” I sat up wearily, rubbing my eyes in an attempt to re-boot my brain. The small hand on the clock was barely scratching the 10. Surely this was just some weird nightmare. I usually didn't drag out of bed until the crack of noon!

Heavy footsteps stomped off across the old floor furnace. Then a sweet voice from the living room called, “Let him alone Nello. Poooor Guy. He's just a growing boy. He needs his rest.” It was my grandma Mimi. She always came to my defense. Unfortunately, in the 20 years I'd been alive I had no recollection of my Papa ever heeding her advice.

Reluctantly I hopped up. After all, I wanted to stick around long enough to enjoy another day of Mimi's cooking before heading back to Junior College. That would mean I'd have to curtail Papa's favorite phrase, “It's my house... Hit the road!”

I wormed into a t-shirt and trudged out like a Mississippi Bed-head Monster with mega-melting morning breath. Mimi handed me a fried egg sandwich. “The toilet's backed up son,” She explained, “Your Papa's out in the yard with poooor little Heath.”

I found them out by the edge of the cotton field. Papa stood like an Italian mountain, his 48” belt cinching up his polyester pants just below his chin. His furry brows hinged in the middle, indicating his foul mood. He raked a thumb through his big nose, as was his habit, and thrust a rusty old shovel at me.

My gangly little brother Heath looked up wearily from the little trench he'd begun. “Papa says we got to find where the drain is clogged.” Obviously he'd experienced his own rude awakening. His blond hair looked like a botched crop circle attempt, and I noticed he had mud splattered all the way up to the colored rings on his knee high tube socks. At least I hoped it was mud. About that time I got a whiff of something that almost caused me to gag my egg sandwich.

Papa had located some sort of underground drainage pipe, and he was most confident if we unclogged it we'd get the toilet flushing again. So for the next two hours we dug it up all the way across the yard back toward the house. It was miserable work, and I'd already begun plotting my escape when the pipe mercifully disappeared under the concrete carport. Papa was sending me for the sledge hammer when little Heath finally spoke up, “Papa, don't you have a septic tank between here and the house?”

Papa took a step back, contemplating the thought. Just as he was running a muddy thumb through his nose Mimi leaned out the door, “Nello, why don't you just call a plumber and leave those poooor boys alone.”

I was sure Papa would explode, but to my surprise, he suddenly chuckled and managed a guilty little smile. “All right der Mary,” he replied, “I'll call to town directly.” It was something I never thought I'd witness in my lifetime.

But anyway- When the plumber arrived he wasted little time examining our trench. Instead, he went right to the heart of the matter, the toilet. He plunged it out and within seconds had it flushing like new.

I guess sometimes we ought to put our rusty shovels down long enough to look around and contemplate whether we're making things more difficult than need be. For example: What's the first thing most of us do when we realize we're sinners? We run right off to the wrong end of the septic tank and start digging!

Trying to attain our own righteousness through works is like offering our muddy tube socks to a holy God. We're not only spurning His grace, but rejecting the gift He has nailed for us on the cross! (*For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: Not of works, lest any man should boast.* **Ephesians 2:8-9** KJV)

I've dug enough trenches to nowhere to learn that from now on, when it comes to eternal matters, I'm calling in a professional. (*For whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved.* **Romans 10:13** KJV) Jesus is the only one who can get right to the heart of this matter.

-Guy Sheffield 1-12-07