

Flashbacks From A Janitor Daze

By Dave Olson

Things I learned the first night:

-when football players are done playing football, they either open restaurants or become car salesmen, both of these allow for plenty of reminiscing, back-slapping and space to hang 8x10 glossies and plaques from their glory days

-car salesmen don't need desks as there is rarely anything in them¹

-when there is nothing to do, you read Sports Illustrated magazines and eat junk food

¹nudie, magazines (the kind where you can almost see the girls large intestine), pens (from other car dealers, insurance companies and car washes), several means for freshening breath

- vinyl and/or Naugahyde are good things
- you can't get busted stealing from the honor box²
- the floor only needs mopped every other night, not every night like the work order would lead you to believe

Things I did and thought (or that just happened to happen):
These were the carefree, happy days;

- started smoking every so often (the cigarettes were free from the Chuck Ethan desk)³

- read the list of dirty jokes that someone typed every few days (most of them were pretty lame but there was one I got a kick out of but no one I told it to ever got it)⁴

flopped my genitals onto the Xerox machine, it seemed like a good idea at the time (a little radiation never hurt)

- opened car doors and turned on all the accessories full power (windshield wipers, stereo (muzak from hell), air conditioner, etc.) and left them that way

²these amazing boxes are cardboard vending machines that someone packs with goodies once a week, you put your money in the slot on top. If there isn't enough money in it when the man comes to collect, he puts a sticker on telling you so. We were at about 23% most of the time.

³Marlboros and Camels, I wanted skin like leather like the Marlboro man, not a penis nose like that swinging Camel guy

⁴ Q: What's the worst part about having AIDS? A: Trying to convince your parents you're from Haiti.

-pooped in the toilets just after cleaning them (there is few greater pleasures, although, it did make my butt-cheeks smell like Peerless Pink, Non-Abrasive Cleaner)

-cleaned a infinite amount of pubic hairs off aforementioned toilets

-sweated with a little blond girl on the big vinyl couch in the lobby

-only mopped the floor once a week

-showed the 100 or so 8x10's to anyone who came to visit (this was an opportunity to do my routine about the coach offering career advise to the 25 yr. old who he just cut from the team cause he blew out his knees or something, "Son, go down and talk to Eddie at Cougar Ford, he's an old linebacker, one of the great ones, he'll take care of you, he understands, you've got heart kid," it was really quite good)

-brought a six pack with me to work most nights

-ate my fill of miscellaneous junk from the honor box until I decided I didn't much like it any more, except for the 'tato skins (monosodium glutamate flavor)

-decided life was alright, nothing to do but smile, smile, smile

These were the days I was a **JANITOR(!)**

(as opposed to someone who merely cleans)

-got a shirt with my name, embroidered on a white oval patch, on it ⁵

-thought to myself: baby, baby ain't this the life

Then one night, Ed the janitor king came by:

"You're doing a good job," he said, "it's nice to see someone really work for their pay and enjoy it."

I told him I enjoyed my job very much, he said he hoped I was with the firm a long time, I could go places.

Go places

He went on to say that Dan (the man who showed me the ropes of building maintenance), said I really knew how to work. I told him to tell Dan⁶ thank-you.

"Stick with me kid," he said, then drove off in his big-pig, janitor king, Cadillac.

Or maybe it was at this point that I really became

a **JANITOR**

-received an offer to carpet clean the capitol building from Ed, bless his janitor king heart

⁵This however, was taken out of my paycheck. \$9.99.

⁶I liked Dan a lot, he was fat, sweaty and showed his butt crack when he vacuumed, like a janitor should. He looked like friar tuck except had side burns. He told me how he set each of his children up with a building of their own to clean.

-started thinking, right after all that, (it was all a very romantic notion) that this was my ideal job, due to the fact that I was really sucking the marrow out of life, scraping against (and absorbing) the grit, reality and soul of the working man's world

-the salesman named Phil Ogle recognized me on the street, "You're the guy that cleans up the office aren't you?" (later I wished I'd struck up a real conversation but couldn't figure out why)⁷

-explained the bit about digging the grit and soul with my co-workers, mistake

-turned on a calculator and figured how much money I could make being a janitor full time, it was a chunk o' dough

-started ambitiously cleaning more than my one building, training fledgling janitors, ordering my own supplies (blue stuff, pink stuff, yellow stuff, vacuum bags) hanging out with other janitors and growing a beard, leaping into the janitor's world

-decided I could clean with the best of them

-finished the series of Jack Kerouac books I was reading and no longer thought any of that stuff about being a working man

⁷In retrospect, this is probably good because I would've asked why so many of his pubic hairs happened to fall out on the toilet seat. I mean, it doesn't happen to me or anything.

Maybe I was depressed from here on . . .there was reason I guess (could be wrong)–

Then one night the vacuum broke, so I went home early:

"Do you know what this means?" asked Ed the janitor king the next morning. He was calling from his car phone although he was probably in his driveway.

I said that maybe it meant the carpets weren't very clean.

"Do you understand the potential ramifications⁸? Blah, blah, blah . . . reputation . . ., integrity . . ., pride . . ., dependability, our company's credo says . . . blah, blah, blah."

I told him I would go and vacuum the carpets, he said his children were going to starve or something.

His palette had apparently just been removed so he spoke hoarsely that day.

We both decided we didn't want to have to have this talk again. It made work less enjoyable.

Finer points (broken man)

⁸He said this word a lot, sort of an intimidation thing. The intimidation thing was pretty central with him.

-dependable Dan the cleaning man came with me the next time to go over the finer points of cleaning, "Good, isn't good enough," he said. He didn't mean it though because he thought the car salesmen were pigs as well, not too mention bastards

-as instructed, I took my job more seriously thereafter

-started mopping the floors every night and cleaning the strip of molding under the chalkboard that the dust fell on

-stayed at the car dealership longer every night, drinking and smoking cigars

-got bored a lot except for the night when a new room had been walled in and new carpets laid so I vacuumed the sawdust and grinned

-the night when everyone was heading out for the company party was alright too, they invited me along but didn't mean it because they were drunk so I got drunk and opened their mail

Ooohoooh, that smell

cigarette butts soaking at the bottom of beer cans
soaking for days next to the coffee cups with green spores,
lichen and miscellaneous fungus procreating up and down the
sides, dregs watered down more and reheated everyday in the
festering microwave, splattered with remnants grease-food for

days (give me convenience or give me death) 7-11 burritos, deep fried chicken, french-fries, mushrooms, zucchinis, lymph nodes, prairie oysters, grease burgers (deep fry these too), stringy chicken with veins still wrapped around the soggy, dripping bones, packets of ketchup, mustard, mayonnaise, relish, onions, hot sauce, garlic, peppers (of which the devil uses all, in the functional, one, serving size)

mostly it was cigarette butts in beer cans (who drinks lite beer anyhow?), they were always lined up underneath the poster of the chick with greasy hand prints on her ample bosom (erect nipples) "she must love mechanics," I said. "She wants it from me," said the mechanics.

The next part (indifference)

Ed came by again:

-we ate hard candies with our feet on the Stan Jeffries desk and talked about sports and girls, I nodded and smiled in agreement a lot

-I called him a hard-ass (in a very nice sort of way), he laughed and said I was one nutty guy

-male-bonding, I decided, had legitimately taken place, we were buddies, peers now, on a strictly personal level

-his Cadillac was very impressive too, I told him

-from then on, no one complained even though I really

did nothing as far as cleaning went, so I did less

Part five (or six)

Ed found out that I'd been stealing ornaments from the car dealer's Christmas tree so I went to his office:

"I'm sorry to have to reprimand you like this, but you'd have to be in my shoes," said Ed.

I told him I understood, really, but I didn't particularly like him very much anyhow. I didn't hate him but I thought it must be sad to be king of the janitors.

This should have made him feel less guilty about punishing me.

I thought.

"I have a Cadillac and make more money than you ever will with an attitude like that."

In retrospect, this is when it started getting especially bad (hindsight being 20/20).

(But it was a big pig Cadillac with gold peel and stick-on pin-striping).

He gave me an attitude adjustment and called me names including

-sarcastic

-ungrateful

-cocksucker

- plain dumbass stupid
- useful as tits on a boar
- thick-headed
- sorry excuse for a human

Ed then said a lot of things about his upbringing, the American way and free enterprise, god and his family. It was a good thing he stopped yelling then, he had already had two strokes and a heart attack (it could have been 2 heart attacks and a stroke, I'm not sure).

At about this point, I began to think about a career with the U.S. Postal Service because you don't have to talk much and you can wear those knee-socks.

Then, being gracious, Ed said he'd give me another chance because he was my age once, I tried to figure out that meant and then told him that although I thought he was very considerate and sportsmanlike, he didn't have to trouble himself to do that, not just for my sake anyhow

He started off again saying how he wasn't going to let me off that easy, I interrupted and asked him if he had an aspirin or if he'd like something from the honor box, he said he was taking it upon himself to make me a contributing member of society, God Bless his Janitor King heart.

"Okay," I said.

I wandered around trying to find my spine while he made me a contributing member of society.

He started vacuuming to show me how it was really done, as hard as I tried, I was never able to sweat that much. (Buckets, I tell you, buckets).

I asked him how high-performance vacuuming produced a fine, upstanding young man.

He yelled more . . . ramifications . . . blah . . .etc . . . blah . . . learn how to work boy . . . dependable is the name of the company . . . blah . . . blah.

"Ed," I said, "Do you know anything about working for the U.S. Postal Service.

His jugular vein went ka-thump, ka-thump, ka-thump, it was inflamed and purple but by this time, the floor was quite tidy and vacuumed so he left to refill his jumbo, plastic convenience store mug with cream soda.

A few weeks later, I'd had enough:

"Ed," I said, "Here's a little something you to look over when you get a chance."

It was a solid, succinct list of why I had to resign:

- my yoga class on Tuesday night conflicted
- I was getting ill from eating the greasy leftover lunch tidbits that were always left on the service desk
- stealing from the honor box and opening people's mail was giving me heavy bad karma
- my application was pending at the post office

-mopping the floor every night was tiring me out
-all in all, I wasn't of firm enough character to
represent the company and thusly putting his
reputation on the line (not too mention the crap
company softball team would have to deal with
every week)

"HMMMMM," said Ed in his janitor king office, "hmmm."

I said the bit about how it hurts me as much as him then
excused myself to the restroom.

The seat made my butt cheeks smell like Peerless Pink
non-abrasive cleanser. It was a smell I was well accustomed
to and whose non-abrasive qualities had certainly had an
impact on me.

The fellow in the stall next to me mentioned how Ed had
said, "Discussion is a very important to the success of a
company."

Ed was wearing one of those velour shirts you used to
see around and I noticed his pear-like shape.

"Sorry can't let you go," Ed said. I hadn't filed my
two-week notice; this was a requirement of quitting.

"Ed, I'm sorry," I said. He told me I wasn't sorry and
told me to stop apologizing for things I hadn't done. I
handed him my list of statistics that mentioned a fairly
close approximation of how many pubic hairs I'd wiped from
the toilet seat. I must have some Freudian ramification, I

told him.

Ed decided someone would fill in for me Tuesday nights for a couple weeks until I could get my scheduling conflict taken care of, "Scratch my back and I'll scratch yours."

"You really are very sportsmanlike and considerate," I said and left to go wipe the Phil Ogle pubic hairs off the toilet seat. "Ed," I said as the door slowly closed, "I'm kind of dumb, but then again, so are you."

The rest of the story:

I gathered up the remaining part of my spine and drove 75 M.P.H. to Taber, Alberta in a rented 1974 Cadillac (\$32.95, 100 free miles) from a discount place down by the bridge. The seats were fat and deep and the steering wheel tilted. I felt genuine, I'd been thinking and pacing all night long, but my hands were steady. Thick, skunky smoke drifted from my nose, I smiled to the rear-view and saw the crescent moon behind.

I sent Ed a gift-wrapped box of sugar from the sugar beet mill here in town. I got a job looking out for any fires. There was almost one last year but concrete doesn't burn and sugar just melts. I mostly walk along high catwalks and look down and watch people look up and wonder what I'm doing.

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