

# Bathroom Language

by Chris Ladd  
EDITORIAL EDITOR

I've been eating since before I can remember, and probably even before that. These habits changed somewhat when I came here, but not as much as you might expect. I still eat the same kinds of foods, still eat breakfast, lunch, and dinner, still snack some in-between meals.

WHERE THE  
HELL IS  
WAYNE, ME

The biggest difference between home and school, the one I want to talk about, concerns the other end of the digestive cycle. It's this difference that's taken some getting used to.

To understand all this, all this change, you must understand one simple pebble of truth: that every toilet on this campus is a public one. Every. Single. Toilet. Whether nestled into the middle of a quiet suite in Tower or tucked away on the third floor of the library, just about anyone with a student I.D. can lock the door and make a deposit at any one of over a hundred convenient locations on campus.

And that's important, really important, because this openness, this latrinal egalitarianism, has changed not only where I do my business on this campus, but also the nature of that business, and my attitude towards my "workplace."

But I'm getting ahead of myself.

When I was a kid, I spent a lot of time in the bathroom. I can't imagine what my parents thought I did there, but they never asked about it, and I was never moved to bring it up. That room, for me, was a sanctuary, a place for thought and reading, deep contemplation. Through some beautiful contortion of mathematics, the mental and emotional weight I gained from those hours of introspection and faded

copies of Popular Science somehow equaled whatever weight I shed in pounds and ounces during the more base functions I came there for. The time I spent then between those ceramic walls is still very special to me.

I spat at the very idea of public toilets then. Big, cold, unwelcoming, dirty metal boxes were no place for a latrine.

Things are different now because things are different here. Every toilet is contained, trapped in a tiny stall, and the paper is stiff and abrasive in a way that wouldn't be such a problem if the food in the dining hall packed more fiber.

I don't even feel comfortable in my own dorm.

The seats are too short. Or, the whole toilet is just grossly undersized, so it's almost inevitable that I'll bump the inside of the toilet bowl at some point with some part of my anatomy. I'm not a large person by any measure, and so I think it's safe to assume that other people have this problem too. This means that they are touching these inner forbidden parts of the bowl just as I am, and it makes me nervous about diseases.

My suite's toilet has its own little room, about two feet by four feet. A room so small that if I were claustrophobic, which I'm not, I might start incorporating more binding foods,

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like peanut butter or cheese, into my diet, and limit my visits.

Some of my suitemates leave reading material in that little room: magazines, a few short paperbacks. I've been tempted to read these sometimes, but I don't know when or at what stage my suitemates handle them, and I don't know any of them well enough to judge their private hygienic habits.



I really can't deal with my own bathroom anymore. I've had to look elsewhere, like New York City outsourcing their garbage to New Jersey.

For all my griping, there really are some nice facilities on this campus. Top notch. There's a bathroom in the upstairs of Case that I frequent; it's cleaned often, and flushes automatically. The basement of the library has a very nice stall, and I

have a friend who swears by the tranquility of Wilson Chapel; it's a normal, house style toilet, and whoever runs the place leaves copies of the Gospel of Mark on top of the porcelain tank.

But these are all far from perfect. They all have that giant roll of toilet paper, and when it breaks off and rolls up into the dispenser, I have to stick my hand up into that tinted plastic case and flop around in there until I

find the lost end. Sometimes I don't find it, and I have to flip that stupid little door and start over.

I know I'm not the only one who does this, and that's why I find it so disgusting. It's the equivalent of watching a stranger come out of a stall and shaking his hand before he has a chance to wash it. No, it's worse. It's like shaking ten suspect hands from ten strangers. It's like ten soiled palms. At these times, I treat my hand like an infected animal, quarantine it from the rest of my body, and walk it in a bubble of personal space to the nearest sink.

Sometimes people walk in while I'm sitting there with my pants bunched up next to my sneakers. For some reason when this happens, I get embarrassed, freeze, and wait soundlessly—sometimes a full two minutes, sometimes stuck in some wholly ridiculous pose—until I hear a flush and a zip and a closing door. Sometimes people sing to themselves

or hum, not even noticing that I'm there, but I don't mind this. The whole point is kind of to pretend I don't exist. It seems unnatural for two complete strangers to be pant-less together.

I think it's this last reflex that says the most about my relationship with latrines on this campus. It's such a private act, and it happens so often. In my two years here, I've gotten more comfortable with the idea of shitting in public. But I don't think it's ever going to feel right. Which is why I'm so looking forward to Thanksgiving.

In less than a month, I'll return to my home, with real tile and soft toilet paper and one of those horseshoe shaped rugs that fits around the base of the toilet. After a night of feasting, I'll go upstairs, shut the door, and flip through an old copy of Popular Science, thinking of old times and dreaming of my own carpeted bathroom.