

CONSTRUCTION HUMOUR AND RELATED ANECDOTES

(As I recall it from over the Years)

People who perform physical labour to earn an Income, try to keep their spirits up so that the workplace can be enjoyable. It is not unusual to have pranks played on each other without anyone getting too upset and it is expected that a Prankster of one day would receive something in return at another.

The workplace becomes more acceptable, and the Workers look forward to working for a living.

I will compose these true incidents but keep names a secret for obvious reasons.

A) The “Stolen” Defecation

This incident took place in Holland and was related to me by a Dutch Draftsman in our Engineering Office, where I was employed at the Prince Rupert Sulfite Pulp Mill back in 1964.

Commercial Privies were not common on small construction projects, and Workers were responsible for their own comfort: “when the time came”. A Whizz was easy as all construction projects were male dominated. The other need was “self regulated” to train your body for a routine that coincided off-project, so to speak.

This story involved an apartment under construction within a community where a hedge of trees surrounded the construction site. One Worker needed to relieve himself and it became more uncomfortable as the shift continued. There was an aroma about him that made this secret difficult to contain.

Finally, there was no choice and out he went, searching for a private location amongst the trees. His co-workers decided to “have some fun” and followed him out shortly after he left and were able to locate themselves behind him as he crouched to perform his task.

Using a shovel, they were able to silently remove the deposit just before the hapless Worker rose from his relief. The natural human action is to look down and to observe “the job”. Perhaps he even thought of burying same.



There was nothing there!

The man almost had a heart attack in surprise.

How would you feel?

B) A Smoking Chimney

This incident was related to me by a Journeyman Carpenter Construction Superintendent. The incident took place in Annabel just up from Trail, B.C., and before Warfield.

All houses in the mid-1950s were constructed with a masonry chimney which was before technology developed Type B chimneys of today that are used for a gas-fired furnace. The dated masonry chimney served wood, coal, oil and gas furnaces as preferred by the Owner.

Masonry block was typically 16" x 16" x 8" high with an 8" x 8" Flue. The construction would begin at the basement floor level and make its way through the roof.

Many families would construct their own house and engage Contractors to build those parts where their skills were limited. In this instance one such person required a masonry chimney and enquired to Masons for a contract price. At one time the Chimney could be built for \$50 but prices went up and a popular Mason's price had risen to \$70. Bargaining took place and the Mason would not reduce his price no matter how many times that he was asked.



Finally, the Mason relented and agreed to build the chimney. As a joke, he installed a 10" x 10" piece of glass halfway up the chimney. He collected his \$50 and the Owner was satisfied that he was able to get his job done at the price he thought was most reasonable.

The Mason received a call much later that the chimney was smoking and that he did not construct it properly. The Mason countered with "give me \$20 and I will make sure the chimney will not smoke."

The dispute continued for a few weeks until Fall and Winter caused action to take place because the house was cold.

The Owner gave up and agreed to pay the Mason the \$20 he requested. The Mason arrived with his ladder, picked up a 3" diameter stone and proceeded to drop it down the chimney.

The chimney did not smoke any more!

C) Footprints on a Toilet Seat

This incident took place in Elkford, B.C., while I was involved in developing a Shopping Center / Hotel Complex for the new community being founded for Fording Coal Co. Ltd.

Elkford is situated at 4,200 Feet AMSL and thus is subject to early winters. Negotiations for this project started in 1971 but the agreement was not reaching until August of 1973 which meant an accelerated schedule to get the roofs on before snow flies. This was further challenged by Fording desiring an apartment to be constructed at the same time for its employees.

We had a washroom trailer but unfortunately temperatures dropped below 40 degrees, and the heating units could not keep the facility comfortable for use as the building construction was for a temporary installation.

The two-storey hotel with a full basement seemed like a suitable alternative. I requested that the Mechanical Subcontractor install a toilet in the basement where at least there would be heat until we could get the Carpenters to build a suitable compartment.

All went well until I got complaints that there were boot markings on the toilet seat. I honestly could not fathom anybody trying to stand on the toilet seat to defecate.



We had crew meetings once a week for planning and safety purposes. I noticed one Labourer was wearing large overshoes with distinct treads. I asked if he would stay back after the meeting for a chat.

“George, how in the Hell did you manage to stand on the toilet seat?” I asked him as he responded with a very surprised look on his face.

He was an honest fellow, and he replied with, “those guys may have Syphilis or Gonorrhea and there is no way I want to get it from them,” he bowed his head apologetically.

“George”, I answered, “there is only one way to get venereal disease and that is from a sexual act with an infected person,” I advised.

“We have no choice, currently, but to have that temporary toilet while we complete permanent facilities. If I find ‘tracks on the seat’ again, I will need to consider replacing you reluctantly.

“I did not know about that. I will cooperate with the crew.”

That was not the best way to resolve that issue, but it all worked out in the end.

D) Put Away that roll of tar paper

Flat roofs were waterproofed in this dated method of melting tar in a gas-fired large kettle with pails of hot tar hoisted up unto a roof where Roofers applied tar paper by mopping tar over the surface sheet and then laying a new sheet over. This method usually had a five (5) sheet total application.



As you
can
imagine it
was a
very



smelly atmosphere and very uncomfortable for the
Applicators and especially for the Roofer chopping

up the solid tar into chunks and adding to the kettle.

In this type of operation, personal needs of the Roofers were also necessary. Typically, a roof would require two days to apply and again toilet facilities were rare. The Workers would step behind a vehicle or a pile of building supplies and perform their tasks.

The crew on the roof would startle the poor guy by hollering loudly above the din of the boiling tarpot ***“put away that roll of tar paper”!***

Construction Workers of today would not likely understand this dated razing.

E) Comments from the Writer

This is intended to be a sample of what the Readers can expect as I take time to recall and draft the incidents.

I hope you enjoy them as much as Constructions Workers have over the years.

Elmer Verigin

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