

Wasting water is . . .

# Money Down the Drain



“Some families spend more on hot water than heating the entire house.”

— Wilbur G., Expert on Everything

It is a trial when I am asked to be an expert on something at which I have very little experience.

Such as hot water. Which I have had to learn about by reading and research.

Because, you see, I am the son of a Navy man.

You would think that a Navy man would know a lot about water and pass it on to his children. And it is a true fact that a Navy chief does know his water. Water to wash decks with and water to wash cars in. Water to water the lawn and water to catch fish in. And of course, water to drink, all of it cold.

But hot water? The only thing a Navy chief knows about hot water is that you are not allowed to have any, except in your coffee.

I did not become acquainted with the water known as hot until I was in my teens, when I was struggling to learn how to be an expert on high school girls. The first thing I learned is that teenage girls prefer a body fragrance on teenage boys that is anything other than their natural

scent. Which led me to baths and showers after all those years of avoiding them except for the first Saturday of each month.

So, on a third Wednesday, I stepped into the bathtub, but when I turned the faucet handle, it fell off in my hand — we only had the one handle, the one on the right; the other was missing — taken by a burglar, according to the Navy chief known as Dad.

There I was sat. In a dry tub with cobwebs in the corners, a chrome handle in my hand and two fixtures that it would appear to fit. The temptation was beyond my power to control.

My heart was racing as I slipped that handle onto the left fixture. Welded into place with years of rust, that fixture did not yield until I applied all my strength and weight. But it did, indeed, yield with a squeal and a hiss of air like a balloon when the knot comes untied.

I dang near leaped out of that tub when I caught that first glimpse of the mystical liquid that was hot water. I

did not know that hot water was the same color as a hot horseshoe, and I figured to be scalded. But no, it was not red-hot water, but rust.

I let it run down the drain until it cleared up, then put in the plug and began to fill the tub.

I did not know of the silent alarm on the hot water tank, of the flashing lights and the automatic call to the 922 hotline of the Office of Navy chiefs with Children.

Until the Navy chief known as Dad burst into the bathroom and shut off that faucet, this time with the squeal and cry of anguish coming from him rather than from the faucet.

“Who?” he said in a whisper. “Told you,” he gasped to his expert-on-everthing-except-the-thing-that-could-not-be-named-in-our-house son. “About hot water?”

I told him I discovered it on my own. “I finally figured out the *H* stamped on that fixture stands for *h-o-t*.”

A look of hopelessness crossed his face. “Finish your bath,” he said. “We have to

have a talk.”

“About what?”

“Shares. Navy shares.”

“Shares?”

“People,” he said, “*civilians*. Call them showers.” He turned to leave.

“Can I have some more water? I’ll take cold.”

“You have enough there.”

“I’m not even damp.”

He did not reply, and later I learned that a Navy shower was all about being damp. You turned on the faucet and got that way. Then you soaped up and shaved and shampooed for as long as you wanted, just so you didn’t add any more water until rinsing time. Then you had 30 seconds of hot water before the automatic relay switched to draw water from the crick out back.

I have since learned that some families spend more on hot water than heating the entire house. That is a true fact. Take it from me, Wilbur G., Expert on Everthing.

How did I become an expert on this? I had three girls. All with the same nickname: *Share*.