

The Last Word

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One of the advantages of living in the country is the quietness.

One of the disadvantages is having to fool with the water system. I used to complain, when we had our house in the subdivision, about the cost and taste of Florida water. But now, after having moved out into the country—and becoming an expert on wells, pumps, aerators, pressure tanks and water softeners—I'm not so sure I wasn't better off when all I did was turn on the faucet and pay the bill.

Our particular system works from a deep, constantly flowing well. The same well serves the house, sprinkling system and air conditioning/heating units. After flowing through all the contraptions in a pump house in the back yard, the water finally arrives at where we live. The majority of this is drunk, flushed, spilled or used for washing. The rest is piped through the heating units and out through a drain pipe into a pond in the pasture.

To give the system a certain romance, the mad plumber installed a number of secret valves. If these are not opened and closed at critical times the water overflows into the yard, or backs up into the bathrooms, where it does exciting things.

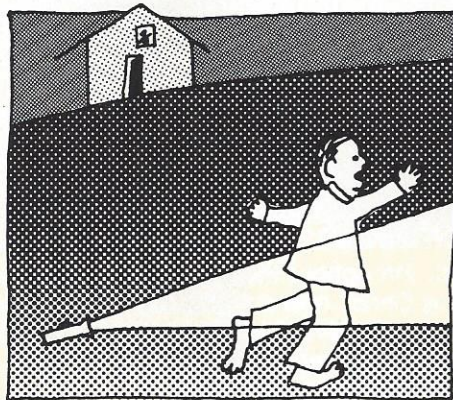
One of these secret valves is connected to the drain pipe going from the heating units to the pond. It is located in the back yard at the edge of the pasture under the barbed wire fence. In case I want to divert this ever-running stream, and use it to wash the car, I only have to turn the valve and open a spigot.

There is one major problem. The cut-off valve which diverts the water from pond to spigot is located in a concrete block which is sunk about ten inches in the ground. To turn the valve, you have to stick your hand down that hole.

The other night, after having told my 14-year-old daughter to hurry up and get her shower, I went to bed. Jackie was already asleep when I heard this strange gurgling in the

heating unit at the end of the hall. I suddenly remembered I had forgotten to reopen the valve after I washed the car that afternoon. That meant the water was either getting ready to overflow out of the heating units into the house, or it was flooding the back yard. I jumped out of bed, grabbed my flashlight, and raced down the stairs to the back door.

The back yard was flooded. Sloshing through the icy water in my bare feet, getting my pajamas wet up to my knees, I dashed to the pump house where I cut off all water to the house. Then I headed out across the pitch black yard, feeling my way between the pines and palmetto patches, to the



edge of the pasture where the underground valve is located.

Kneeling in the cold mud beside the sunken valve, I foolishly forgot to look down the hole with my flashlight before putting my hand in there. When I put my hand in the hole I felt something move. Something slimy.

I withdrew my hand at great speed and, at the same time, leaped high off the ground from my kneeling position. Unfortunately, I had forgotten I was directly beneath the barbed wire fence. The result was disastrous.

When I became a Christian, I lost most of my old vocabulary. This robs me of the necessary safety valve to handle such emergencies. So, instead of cursing, I threw my flashlight. Unfortunately, it landed in the middle of the pond—leaving me in total darkness.

Ripping myself loose from the barbed wire, I staggered backwards

away from the fence. In the process, I stepped in doggie-do. Hopping around in the high grass, I ran a thorny briar between my big toe and the toe right next door—in a place where nothing harsher than a wash cloth had been in thirty years.

That which I lost I suddenly found—and a torrent of expletives issued forth, waking everyone in the house. Lights were flashing on all over the place as I went crashing through the shrubs, my pajamas ripped half-off, my back and neck bleeding, roaring back to the house in order to blame someone.

I had stopped to wash my foot off in the flooded back yard when I heard my daughter shouting from upstairs, "Hey, I'm all soaped up and there's no water in the shower."

Although I was back in control with the choice of words, I didn't seem to be able to control the volume. Thus I informed her, with a roar which could have been heard a mile away, that there was plenty of water down where I was and if she was unhappy she ought to join me.

Jackie finally came down the stairs in her bathrobe and we got the valve shut and the water turned back on. We never did find out what that slithery thing was in the hole.

For years I have been teaching that while the American church applauds accomplishment as the mark of success, God is more interested in what we become along the way than whether we arrive.

I am not sure what I became that night. But one thing is certain. I have not yet arrived.

Not only am I out a brand new three-battery flashlight, but I ruined a perfectly good pair of pajamas and had to undergo three weeks of laughing, humiliating ridicule from my children who couldn't let me forget it was Mom who had to come down and twist all the valves and then lead me back up the stairs to the safety of my bed.

Fortunately, no one else knows. You see, we live in the country where things are quiet. ☪