



Clean sheets

The sun was bright that morning as I searched the pasture field for newborn calves. Spring leaves, wet with dew were fluttering a delicate green in the fresh breeze. After a long search I headed back to the farmstead without any babies to report. The last several newborns were bouncing around the barnyard or playfully bunting for their breakfast as the cows lazily stood and chewed.

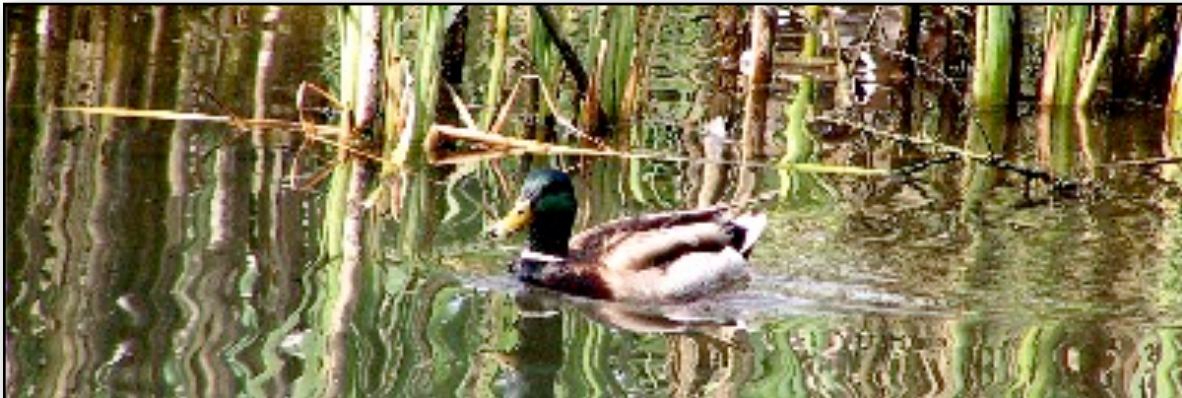
After breakfast, Father sent me out to the field to finish the ploughing and I spent the balance of the morning on the tractor. The air was full of dust and when I turned downwind I had to cover my mouth with a cloth to avoid breathing in the excess dirt. When the sun was high and my stomach was growling, I shut the tractor off and walked a half-mile across the soft field for lunch. Mother had sandwiches and homemade soup ready for us and we chatted leisurely until Father came in from the barn. "Are you scared yet?" he asked with a grin. Until that time, I had been avoiding the thought of driving into the hospital that afternoon. Now, apprehension filled my thoughts and the fear of the unknown crept over me. I had been scheduled for oral surgery to have some teeth removed and had not been looking forward to the procedure. That fearful moment had now arrived, and as my parents busied themselves with preparation for the trip, I moped around the farmyard, worrying.

An hour's drive later, we arrived at the hospital. A nun sitting at Admitting directed us to the second floor nursing station and we headed for the stairway. Our footsteps echoed in the empty tunnel of the stairwell and my thoughts returned to the gentle breezes and soft grass of the farm again. Once the preliminary paper work was done, they showed me my room which would be my home for the next couple of days.

There were a couple of grumpy looking old farmers in the room as I sat down on the side of my bed. I bounced a little and springs squeaked; the room smelled like disinfectant and a feeling of nausea crept over me. My mom sat my night bag beside me on the bed and gave me a reassuring hug. "They would be back in a couple of days and the staff here seemed to be friendly and knowledgeable," she said. "Don't worry."

With my parents gone, I felt alone with only the “old guys” left in the room. I just sat there scared, fearful of the unknown, afraid that my procedure might be painful and I was already missing my home. Finally, a nurse arrived with some clothing in her arms. She placed them on the bed and looked over at me with a look of uncertainty as she began pulling the curtain around my bed. “How old are you?” she asked. “Twelve,” I said dryly. “Take your shoes off and put them up here under the front of the bed,” she said as she shook out the hospital blanket. With the blanket folded at the bottom of the bed, the sheets looked a bright white. I sat back down and began unbuttoning my shirt.

As I looked around, I noticed how sterile everything seemed to be. No dust, no grass, no dirt, no smells, except for the antiseptic smell that seemed to permeate everything. I slipped out of my pants and the nun lifted my legs up onto the bed. Then, for the first time, I became acutely aware of how dirty I was! My feet were black with field dirt. My hands and fingernails were filthy from farm work, and as I squirmed around on the bed I left a layer of dirt everywhere I touched. The nurse smiled and said, “Here, slip on this gown and come with me.” I trembled at the thought of going into surgery, but followed obediently. She led me down the hall in my dirty bare feet to a room with a large walk-in shower. After some basic instructions, she left me to scrub down with orders to pay particular attention to my feet and hands. Savouring the moment, I didn’t emerge again until the nurse came back again to ask if I was all right.



Once dried off, I was able to return to my room, a new clean creature barely recognizable from my former self. The top sheet had been replaced on my bed, enabling me to start over again with clean skin on clean sheets. Once tucked in, I again fought the embarrassing memory of seeing my dirty body against those clean, sterile sheets. The rest of my hospital stay went well, and two days later my folks returned to take me back to the freedom of the forest and the farm once again.

I believe it might have been worth all the tension and pain of that hospital visit to see myself in a new light. We all grow accustomed to our surroundings and are unable to visualize ourselves as others may see us. This was certainly the case, being raised on the farm with a limited water supply and working on the land each day.

Looking back on that experience, I think of how much our lives resemble this story. Each day, we live in our respective surroundings, watch television, read books, listen to music and swap jokes with our friends. With each passing moment, some of the world's filth rubs off on us; the immoral things we see and hear on television, the murder we witness at the movies, ungodly messages we hear in our music or the off-colour content of the jokes we hear. All of this is like dirt; dirt that we don't notice or cannot even see on our lives unless we contrast it with some other life or some other place that is truly clean.

Being born into this world to human parents in a human home with human friends who also live just like us, we naturally become comfortable and complacent with our surroundings. For me, a walk to the barnyard, feeding pigs in their veritable wallow of mud and muck was a contrast that I could relate to. Our human home was infinitely more sanitary than the pigpens or the barn, making one immediately thankful that we are higher up on the intelligence scale. The way animals interacted with each other and their moral behaviour, fighting for their slop or attempting to mate with just about any other pig, was also a vast contrast to human behaviour. But what if I was to tell you that we are not nearly the highest on the scale of intelligence and that our morality and interaction with each other are far from what was intended for us as humans?

A visit to your local health food store will teach you that it does matter what we ingest and how we treat our bodies. Here, you will find numerous ways of detoxifying our bodies, cleansing our blood and maintaining good health by the foods we do or do not eat. But, what about our minds; do we need to be concerned about cleansing our minds? Will the violence, sex, cursing, murder and crime that we watch on TV affect us the way unhealthy foods do? Do we need to go on a mind-cleanse the way we go on a cleansing fast for our physical body? Or does it even matter? Then you might think, what about my heart and soul? Do the immoral things we think or perform affect us in a way that needs to be cleansed?

Naturally, we would ask "Why? Compared to what or to whom?" As humans, we look to one another for approval and to contrast our lives with. You might hear, "I'm sure glad we don't live like those people do," or "How can they possibly live that way?" as we compare our lives to someone else's. We drive through our community and find ourselves making silent judgments as we travel along. "Look at that person's yard. Don't they have any self respect?" We pick up our children from school and notice that some other children are dirty and dressed poorly and we wonder what sad circumstances they must endure. We are making comparisons, not with someone higher up the scale of intelligence, or as we are taught in school, "higher up the evolutionary scale," but with our fellow human beings.

So, who should we compare our lives to; and to whom shall we aspire to be like, if not our fellow human beings? The answer to this is found in the original comprehensive manual written for all mankind. The manual talks of "intelligent design" and of standards that are beyond our earth; standards that we as humans were designed for and

intended to pursue and aspire to. These ideals were originally written into our nature for the express purpose of reflecting our Creator's advanced character, that we should reflect His higher design.

I recall the excitement and relief within myself when I first learned of God and found that He had a higher calling for us. I was encouraged to find that He was calling us to increase our knowledge and use our intelligence for the purpose of understanding our world around us--the people we interact with on a daily basis, and increasing our moral character. It is God who promises us "Though our sins be as scarlet, we shall be white as snow." Here, God is referring to a time when we invite the Lord Jesus Christ to take up residence within us, asking for His forgiveness. It is then that Christ washes us "white as snow" and allows us to begin over with a renewed mind and a clean heart.

Having lived your entire life in this dirty world, you might be somewhat apprehensive of approaching God in His purity and perfection. Let me encourage you to put your fears aside and boldly come to Jesus as Saviour and ask Him to forgive you of all the things you have done that might have displeased Him. Jesus paid a terrible price for the chance to be able to offer you and I salvation, free for the asking! We don't have to clean up first. God asks us to come as we are. We can be from a Christian country, a Muslim country or any country, and be welcomed. Jesus came for all mankind and bids all of us, "Come and drink of the water of life." When we do come, we will find that Jesus' purpose is to carry all of our iniquities and to heal us of all our diseases. He wants us to invite Him in to ourselves, to learn of Him and His ways. By simple belief in the Son of God, He begins to wash our souls of all the filth of the world and encourages us to strive to remain clean. He wants each of us to be clean sheets.



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