

“Lucy, You’ve Got Some ‘Splaining To Do!”

(or My Life as a Well-Meaning But Sometimes Ditzzy Redhead!)

By Christie Zarria

Have you ever had a moment when you chose to do something that seemed totally logical at the time, only to look back on it later and ask yourself, “What in the world was I thinking??”

This is such a tale.

Let me preface this story by introducing you to Marion Donovan, a little known and unsung inventor-heroine of the mid-twentieth century. Mrs. Donovan’s claim to fame is the disposable diaper, which totally revolutionized parenthood for us baby boomers who had begun producing our own generation in the 70’s and 80’s. Unfortunately for me, Mrs. Donovan’s brainchild was initially considered a novelty and a luxury, so when our firstborn made her entrance in 1972, we had to endure a soon-to-be-obsolete commodity known as the cloth diaper.

Unlike Mrs. Donovan’s wonderful invention, cloth diapers were labor intensive. They had to be washed and sanitized, preferably by a diaper service, if you were lucky enough to afford one. Otherwise, we used diaper pails with a soaking solution until the soiled cloths could be laundered in our washing machines, and hung to air dry in the sunshine. Wet diapers were a constant nuisance, but relatively easy to deal with, whereas poopy diapers often presented a dilemma.

Apparently, there was a plethora of opinions on how to best handle dirty cloth diapers, including such gross techniques as rinsing them outside (eeww!!), but to me, the most logical process involved carefully depositing the poop into a toilet by grasping a non-poopy corner of said diaper, then performing the “dip and rinse” method while wearing household gloves – I’m sure you get the picture. I mean, the toilet is where the rest of the poop in the house goes, right? It made

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perfect sense to me. If the diaper had a particularly gnarly deposit, it was left to soak in the toilet - for a short period of time. But let me tell you, that is also a dangerous practice. I speak from experience.

Yes, I left a dirty poopy diaper soaking in the toilet. It was one of those days as a young mother that you really just want to flush from your memory. The baby was unusually colicky that day, so between changing dirty diapers, trying to soothe an extremely fussy newborn and retain my own sanity, I had a moment of weakness and left a dirty diaper in the toilet. Not a big deal until later, when I rushed in to use the toilet myself. I sat down, quickly emptied my bladder, stood up and as my fingers pressed the handle to flush, I suddenly remembered the soaking diaper and screamed, “NO!!!” I watched in dismay as the diaper disappeared into the toilet and lodged somewhere out of sight, while the water in the bowl began to rise like Old Faithful about to erupt.

Most women in this situation would probably not panic. They would simply call a plumber. But we were living on a teacher’s salary, and money was tight. Additionally, my husband had a distinct aversion to my practice of letting diapers soak in the toilet. He was constantly warning me, “One of these days, you’re going to flush one of those down the toilet and create an expensive plumbing nightmare for us!” I could hear his voice echoing in my ears, like some kind of demonic chant: “Expensive plumbing nightmare! Expensive plumbing nightmare!” I could not let him know that his prophesy had come true, but I had only a couple of hours to figure out what to do before I had to pick him up from his teaching job.

My dad was a maintenance engineer and had taught me many things, including how to extract foreign objects from a stopped toilet. Summoning my best “what would Daddy do?” attitude, I first grabbed the plunger and pumped as hard as I could. Nothing. No water movement at all. Taking a deep breath, I decided the next step was a wire coat hanger. I rigged my hanger-hook

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and as expertly as any janitor, made multiple attempts to snag the diaper - alas, to no avail.

I sat back for a minute, trying to think straight, although fear was rising in my gut almost as fast as water had risen in the toilet bowl. Then it came to me: I needed to remove the toilet bowl from the floor to see if the diaper had lodged in the bowl itself or below in the trap. My dad and I had once unclogged a toilet in an older apartment that way, so I grabbed the toolbox and entered Phase Two of my plumbing repair. I was so proud of myself for remembering which wrench to use, and how to undo the bolts that attached the bowl to the floor. Unfortunately, what I did NOT remember was that the bowl and tank unit that Daddy and I had worked on was a freestanding style, while the tank of my current system was mortared into our ceramic-tiled bathroom wall. As I attempted to move the bowl to one side, I heard a metallic “SNAP!” and stood horrified as water gushed from the gaping hole in the iron pipe connecting the tank and bowl.

I was in full blown panic mode now. I was out of time, so I did what any reasonable person would do under the circumstances. I picked up the bowl, with its jagged pipe hanging from the back like some kind of elephantine deformity, and put the whole thing in the bathtub. I quickly mopped up the floor, closed the shower curtain, grabbed the baby and headed out to pick up my husband.

I honestly don’t remember how I got to the school. As I approached the parking lot, I had a fleeting impulse to keep going and hightail it to Mexico or some other faraway place so I didn’t have to face what I knew was coming. But like a robot controlled by a remote power source, I pulled in and waited.

He got in the car, said hi to the baby, kissed me on the cheek and said, “How was your day? You look a little frazzled!” I burst into tears.

At first, he was very concerned. “Oh my gosh! What’s wrong, honey? What’s happened? Is

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someone sick? Did someone die?” With each question, all I could do was shake my head “no” and keep sobbing. Finally he said, “For goodness sake, just tell me, please!”

“I flushed a diaper down the toilet,” I finally managed to choke out between sobs. He heaved a sigh, but with his next breath, he said, “It stopped up, didn’t it?” I nodded.

“How many times have I told you this would happen? Did you get it out?” I shook my head. “So it’s still stopped up?” I nodded. By this time, we were pulling into our driveway at home. He exited the car quickly, tossed his stuff on the sofa, and headed toward the bathroom. He opened the door and gasped at the sight. Then he got quiet, looked around, and turned to me with a puzzled look on his face.

“Where’s the toilet?” I gave him a blank stare. He asked me again, this time more directly, in a louder voice: “Christie, WHERE IS THE TOILET?”

“In the bathtub,” I finally managed to whisper. His eyes grew wide at first, then he frowned, closed his eyes and shook his head. “Where??” he asked again in disbelief, with his eyes still closed and the frown deepening. I edged a little closer to the bathroom door.

“It’s in the bathtub?” I said shakily, as if I weren’t sure anymore. In what seemed like slow motion to me, he pulled back the shower curtain. Sure enough, there in all its mangled glory, sat our toilet.

He stood there quietly for what seemed like an eternity, just staring at it. Finally, still shaking his head in disbelief, he turned to me and asked,

“So, what? Did you think I just wouldn’t notice??”

We stared at each other for a moment, silently considering the absurdity of my actions. I could suddenly picture Lucille Ball and Desi Arnaz in the middle of one of her zany stunts and a nervous giggle rose up in my throat. He shook his head again and sighed, but I saw a small smile

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crack his face. I dissolved into a puddle of mixed laughter and tears, and I knew that the worst was over.

Initially, my dear husband did not find the whole event amusing, but it eventually became one of his favorite “gotcha” stories to tell on me. After nearly fifty years of marriage, the statute of limitations has still not run on this one!

Oh, by the way, Daddy did come to the plumbing rescue later that night – AND we began using disposable diapers shortly thereafter! Thank you, Marion Donovan!