

Male Bonding

By Chris Zell

Have you ever had one of those days when male bonding was the best thing to happen to you? And we all know what male bonding is. It's when you sit in a darkened bar and have some guy burp the theme from the Love Boat at you. In this case the burper in question was a guy who had wanted to listen to some songs that I'd written with another guy. It never did sound like a good idea to me, but what the hell. You can't be embarrassed too much in this life I always say.

We put the tape in the Walkman and turned it on. That was our first mistake. I think that, as a public service, the Sony Corporation should spend an extra \$.30 and put a little sticker on the Walkman that reads: 'While wearing this high quality music reproduction equipment don't be an idiot and try to talk to anyone.' This guy started to scream out his impressions of the songs at a decibel level that made the construction crew tearing apart the highway come in and ask us to keep it down.

I'm sinking lower into my chair until I find myself sitting on the floor. As a public service to you younger readers, when you're old enough to patronize the adult amusement industry, don't even think of sitting on the floor. There are life forms there that wouldn't survive under your refrigerator. I tear myself off the floor and go to the bathroom to try to wash the future cure for some disease off my sweatpants. I go into the little stall to try and assess the damage and see if I can waste as much time in the men's room as possible. It's not as easy as you'd think. There's a fine line between taking care of personal hygiene and trolling for new friends in a men's room.

I stand in the stall mainly because I'm a little afraid of the toilet. Oh, it's not those old wives tales about catching something in public toilets that's bothering me. What's bothering me is that the water is brown. I'm not sure if this is just a new rest room thing, designer toilet water, but it doesn't have me asking for the recipe. I get my sweats off and the damage isn't bad at all. I guess the slime on the floor is more or less permanent. But I made a note to tell a friend of mine who is in the mold department at MIT to come down and check this place out.

As I'm putting on my sweats I notice a little tag in the back with washing instructions. That's fine. If we still have directions on shampoo bottles I guess I can live with this. But there is another tag that reads: DUE TO THE BULKY MATERIAL AND ATHLETIC COLORS WASH SEPARATELY. Now what the hell is an ATHLETIC COLOR? A pumped up purple? A shapely chartreuse? And what would be a NON-ATHLETIC COLOR? A bloated brown? A couch potato copper? Things are moving way to fast for me these days.

I get back to my seat and the concert is over. I have impeccable timing. Just when I think that the worst is over, someone comes over to ask me about my girlfriend.

"Ah, thanks for asking, but she left me last night."

"Aww, man, how come? What'd ya do?"

"It seems that I didn't get her exactly what she wanted for her birthday."

"What'd she want?"

"My death certificate."

After that I was forced to sit around listening to other men's tales of woe until I couldn't take it anymore and got everyone to sing the entire Morrissey catalog (we did an especially heartfelt rendering of 'Hairdresser On Fire'). When one guy in a Wentworth Glass ('You can see right through us' read the slogan on his back) work shirt decided to solo on 'Driving Your Girlfriend Home' I figured that I'd done just about enough damage for one evening.

I arrived at the dark, lifeless house and tossed myself into my cold, lonely bed. (Writers Secret: that last passage was written to twist the sympathies of the female reader. You'll get more of this inside information if you buy my new video 'Making Money Off People By Letting Them Think They Are Getting Inside Information.') The second my head hits the pillow, visions of this day finally being over slam dancing in my head, the fire alarm in the building goes off. I lay there for over a minute hoping someone else will take care of the problem.

I don't know why we have a fire alarm, it short circuits so much that no one takes it seriously. After a few minutes I realize that it's up to me to go turn the damn thing off. My roommate Bill won't wake up. He has four alarm clocks spread throughout his room and he's still always late for work. So I crawl out of bed, throw on some shorts and head to the basement.

I get to this large panel with flashing yellow and red lights and open it up. From what I could understand from the frantic light show, we were under attack by people who showed up without an invitation and we were now under marshal law. Marshal Dillon will have a press conference in the morning. I figured that I'd read about it in the morning paper so I found the off switch and stopped the siren. I start walking back to my room when Bill stumbles down the stairs dressed in his night time disaster uniform of bare feet, shorts and no shirt.

"Did you reset it?" Always the know-it-all. If anyone ever wants to talk about anything more complicated than putting the key in the front door, I have to send them to Bill. Once Bill rewired a lawn mower and made a nifty microwave oven. One day I got home to find Bill in the garage working on one of his cars. I looked around as he closed the hood and asked,

"Bill, shouldn't these parts here go back into the engine before you're finished?" I may not know much about cars, but I do know engine parts. Most of the time they're things I've never seen before. These parts tossed around the garage certainly fell into that category.

"Nah, I didn't want that in the car anymore." I just nod and made a note not to drive in that car with him anymore.

"I turned it off." I told him totally confident that I turned the fire alarm off. But he had to try to reset it. I sat on a shaky wooden crate and watched the master work. He toggled switches, flipped buttons, read labels and I sat there wiping dirt off my feet.

Just as Bill was seriously talking to me about the ramifications of a possible overload of the oscillating positive flow someone banged on the basement door. Bill opened the door and a guy bursts in and looks at Bill and I, both dressed like we're waiting for high tide to come in so we can start hanging ten, and asks,

"Did this just go off by itself or were you guys down here fooling with it?"

"Oh, yeah," I say trying to place that sentence in the correct ranking of most asinine questions of all time. Definite top ten material. "I often wake Bill up at 11:30 and say, hey, Bill, let's just put shorts on and go down to the basement and fool with stuff." I walk up the stairs wiping my feet on the carpet knowing that it's now 11:57 PM and nothing more can happen today.

I'm about to say good night to Bill, who agreed that it was a top ten stupid question, but he stopped me and asked,

"Did you know that the cable TV is out?"

"Oh, man." I say right at the stroke of midnight.