

Saving the outhouses to preserve Americana

Many of us like to think we live "out in the country." But it really doesn't matter how much property surrounds your home, or how far away from the city limits you are, you're not really out in the country unless you have an outhouse.

Using this definition, and judging by the latest census figures I could find, not many of us live in the country anymore. According to the 2000 Census, about 670,000 households — 0.6 percent of the population — were still using outhouses. Presumably, that number has dropped even further since then, because AOL has ranked outhouses among the "Top 25 Things Vanishing from America."

This probably isn't such a bad thing, and I speak from experience here, because we still have an outhouse on the



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summer range of our family ranch in Wyoming. It is a simple, white-painted edifice standing at the southern end of a beautiful, windswept meadow, but it is not for the faint of heart. It is a building constructed for need, not desire.

The ranch is 17 miles from the end of the closest pavement and the nearest neighbor is more than a mile away, but the outhouse is a three-holer, built, apparently, with the expectation of company. Nobody in the family today can remember a time when it wasn't there.

Several years ago, during a

family reunion at the ranch, we were informed that the summer project was to move the outhouse. Conventional wisdom held that the outhouse should be moved every 20 years or so. Since it had been 30, the project had gained urgency.

"I won't detail what's involved with moving an outhouse except to say that a Boeing engineer and large quantities of beer only complicate the process. The move was eventually completed and the relocated outhouse now stands proudly next to an exceptionally green patch of grass. The point being, it's still there while so many other outhouses are disappearing.

I expect many people would simply say, "good riddance," and flush. But a group of people up in Nova Scotia

has formed the Outhouse Preservation Society and the Outhouse Museum to keep outhouses from becoming extinct (motto: restore, rejuvenate, renovate, recycle and reuse). You can become a lifetime member for only \$10 (U.S.) a year.

The Outhouse Museum (adult admission \$4) is in the Rossignol Cultural Center, leading me to speculate about what passes for culture in Liverpool, Nova Scotia. I'm just not sure what there is to see, but isn't that the problem with most things that become extinct? We don't miss them until they're gone.

The online newsletter "Outhouse Moon" says: "Outhouses represent something more than just a place of relief. They are the symbol of disappearing Americana. They are the

echoes of a time long past, and a reminder to appreciate what we have."

Personally, I agree with that, but I'm a little less certain of how committed I am to actually preserving outhouses, even at our ranch. Yet, you have to draw a line in the sand somewhere. Across the country, more and more of our beautiful, stately wooden barns are disappearing. In towns everywhere, elegant old buildings are being razed to make room for larger houses or high-rises. Every day, more Americana disappears. Is the outhouse the best symbol for the effort to preserve Americana? I don't know, but it must be No. 1 or No. 2.

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Request to chefs: Hold the cilantro — far from his plate

I am a reluctant warrior, but I have decided to join the fight. The enemy is everywhere, seems to be growing stronger, and has many on its side. But sometimes, you have to stand up for what you believe.

I believe cilantro should be banned. And I am not alone.

For reasons that I simply cannot fathom, chefs across the country are adding cilantro to their dishes, apparently under the false impression that it improves the flavor. To clarify, there is no doubt cilantro adds flavor; the debate is over whether it improves it, and I say, no, it doesn't. At all. Under any circumstances.

I'm sure this comes as a shock to many of our local farmers. According to the most recent crop report



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(2007) from the Ventura County Agricultural Commissioner's office, cilantro is a \$13 million crop here. I'm not sure how much cilantro that actually represents, but it's millions of dollars more than we need. I encourage our farmers to switch to lettuce and broccoli. I like both of them, and they could use a little boost here. Or how about avocados? You can't have too many avocados.

Still, I can't place all the blame on the farmers. Cilantro has been around for a long time. According to the Burpee Seed Co. Web site, "Cilantro

has been used for many centuries in the cooking of Mexico, India, Africa, Spain, Russia, China, many areas of Asia — especially Thailand and the Middle East." Not coincidentally, that's a good list of the areas where it is impossible to find a decent cheeseburger.

The Burpee company sells a packet of cilantro seeds for \$3.95. You can grow the cilantro for its leaves ("use pungent leaves in Oriental and Mexican dishes") or wait for seeds to develop (coriander) to make curry powder. The Web site then goes on to offer a recipe for "Mexican-Style Pizza With Cilantro."

There's the problem in a nutshell. Pizza is Italian and note that Italy does not appear on the list above. Pizza does not need cilantro. Truthfully,

neither does anything else I eat, including Mexican, Indian, Spanish or Chinese food.

For a long time, I've simply suffered cilantro in silence. Emphasis on suffered. But I've discovered there are many more like me out there. Like the people at IHateCilantro.com. The first line on their Web site is: "Cilantro. The most offensive food known to man."

That may be a little much. Either that or they've never eaten in an airport, but I can't fault the sentiment. They go on to say, "No normally functioning human being would ever in a lifetime consider cilantro edible." Then, almost inexplicably, they attempt to describe what cilantro tastes like. I say it tastes bad. People writing in

to the Web site go further, saying it tastes like powdered soap and metal shavings, stink bugs, a musty basement, blood, worn out rubber bands, gym socks, mildew, wet underwear or earwax. I'm on their side of the argument, but how do they know what these things taste like?

Look, I understand there are people out there who like cilantro. There are probably people who enjoy dental surgery, too. To each his own. All I'm asking for is a little consideration. To all of you cilantro-infatuated chefs out there, how about you serve it on the side? Or better yet, substitute avocados.

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Buying a swimsuit with the wife takes years off your life

A man should never go along when his wife decides to go shopping for a bathing suit. It sounds kind of sexy, but it really isn't. And yet, when my wife announced she was in the market for a new suit, I went with her, although ruthfully, I only went because I needed new socks and I hate driving to the mall.

Still, I should have listened to that little voice in my head telling me it was a bad idea. Actually, it was more like a foghorn warning, but I really needed socks.

When a man buys a new pair of swim trunks, it's a pretty simple process. You go to the far corner of the men's department, find the single rack of trunks, ask a passing clerk, "Where are the mediums?"



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about a particular suit, the answer is ALWAYS, "You look great!" The truth is, some women (not my wife, or your wife, of course) choose full-coverage models and end up looking like a hot air balloon. Other women (again, no wife I'm actually acquainted with), choose skimpier models and leave you wishing they'd

grab a pair in navy blue, pay and you're right back in the car. Women approach the process differently.

First, women actually care how they look in a bathing suit. So, when your wife asks your opinion

gone with the hot air balloon. But regardless of where they fall on that continuum, when a woman finally decides on a swimsuit, it is only after a great deal of introspection, trial and error, and flattering lighting. So, say it looks great and escape with your life.

Personally, I don't know how a woman ever chooses a suit. When my wife and I walked into the department store there were racks and racks of suits, tops here, bottoms there, and a staggering tangle of strings, straps and bows. I looked, and I couldn't find a sign anywhere that said "mediums."

Since it was the season, I also looked to see if they had a teenie-weenie yellow polka dot bikini. They didn't. It was just as well, as my wife

wouldn't have liked it anyway. Every now and then I'd hold up a suit and say, "How about this one?"

At first my wife would just shoot me a look and say, "No." Then she stopped responding entirely. I was just trying to be helpful, but I didn't mean to imply that I had any part in my wife's ultimate decision. My opinions were neither solicited nor accepted, so I decided to just back off and wait her out.

Eventually, my wife emerged from the racks clutching a handful of hangers, each trailing colorful bits of fabric and enough straps to tie down a load on an eighteen-wheeler. She veered off down an aisle, I fell in behind her and we were off to the fitting rooms.

There's just nothing to be gained

by a man hanging around the women's fitting rooms so I sort of lingered out in the main aisle trying not to look like a shoplifter. My wife saved me. "Babe, there's a chair over here."

I knew I was in for a wait, so the chair was a godsend. There was no TV, but still, it was better than standing in the aisle. So, I sat, got comfortable, and went into a coma. When my wife came out, I was much older, but well rested.

In the end, she found a suit she liked, I bought my socks and we lived to tell the tale.

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