

A Dark Night at the Great Jones County Fair

If you've never been to the Great Jones County Fair in Monticello, you probably don't like country music. They do a great job attracting top performers every summer, and LuAnn and I were there last month to see Florida Georgia Line on a Saturday night.

Midway through the performance I elected to temporarily overcome my germophobia and visit the heavily-used portable chemical toilets at the far end of the grandstand. It was really dark over there and really muddy due to an afternoon thunderstorm, so I turned on my iPhone light so I could see where the heck I was going.

I stepped inside a vacant toilet, using the light from my iPhone to locate a place to set it down so I could see what I was doing and utilize both hands for the task at hand. I immediately ruled out the grungy area next to the toilet seat, then I noticed a small triangular shelf at eye level where they sometimes keep a spare roll or two of toilet paper. I positioned the phone on the shelf to illuminate the ceiling.

As soon as I removed my hand from the phone it slipped through a large unseen slot in the shelf, bounced once next to the toilet seat and plunged directly into the abyss. It sank a couple of feet down, with its light illuminating its immediate surroundings, now a pretty, blue translucent glow.

I just stood there. My first thought was, "I am NOT reaching in there after it." My second thought was, "Well, maybe it's not down as deep as it looks." I could always clean off my arm with sanitizer and paper towels at the hand wash station outside. Uh, no.

Despite the faint glow deep in the abyss, it was still almost totally dark in that tiny room. My biological urge briefly overcame my distress about the phone, at which point I realized I hadn't noticed if the urinal was on the right or left. I was NOT going to feel around for it, so I unzipped and peed left in the general direction where I assumed the urinal was. It was totally possible that the urinal was behind me, and I was peeing on the wall.

It occurred to me later that I could have safely peed directly into the pit onto my valiant iPhone, but that just seemed wrong.

I reluctantly exited the toilet, still conflicted about what to do, and I ended up holding the door for a young woman who was impatiently waiting to enter. I briefly considered warning her about what to expect, but then it was too late. The door closed and I imagined her being startled by what looked for all the world like a pit full of glowing nuclear waste. I didn't hang around to find out if she was going to be comfortable sitting on a toilet seat above God Knows What.

So much for that phone until two days later, when I received a phone call at work from an employee at the Great Jones County Fair saying the chemical toilet guy had turned in a number of phones that had gotten caught in the filter as he was pumping out the contents. Mine was evidently the only one that had a business card wedged between the phone and the case, and they were willing to send it to me.

There are a number of Internet tips about how to revive a submerged iPhone, the most attractive of which (for obvious reasons) involved soaking it in alcohol. Results were negative and I am now the proud owner of a small, flat, still slightly damp but presumably sterile paperweight.

I'm sure we'll go to next year's fair, and equally sure I'll keep a tighter grip on my new iPhone. But I'm still not sure what side that urinal was on.

Writers Group member Dave Parsons had always assumed he'd never be the idiot who drops his cell phone in a toilet or porta potty.