

I Took a Leak with Ted Kennedy

On August 26, 2009 Ted Kennedy died after a long battle with brain cancer. He was a man who drew mixed reactions from most people. Whether you loved or hated him, you had to admire the way he handled the pressures and adversity loaded on him during his life, and he was a famous person. It was this fact that made me remember my one glimpse of the man.

Many years ago when I was still working, I got a call one morning at the office from a former colleague living in the Washington, DC area and working for the USDA. Stim very excitedly says to me, "Guess who I took a leak with last night?"

I wondered what kind of joke he was up to. Mainly I wondered this because he had been known to start some weird stuff. When we worked together in Memphis and attended night graduate school at Memphis State, we generally capped off the evening by stopping in one of the local beer joints on the way home. Soon after arriving for the beer Stim would head to the restroom. On returning he would say, "I just put some change in the urinal. Watch for the next guy to go in, and then we'll check when he comes out to see if the money is still in the urinal." If it was still there we would add a few cents and try again. Rarely did the amount get over a dollar before it would disappear. We would then watch and see if the guy left or if he paid for his next beer with change. Silly, but what the hell, there wasn't much to do for entertainment back then!

So you see it did not surprise me that he mentioned something to do with a restroom. Continuing his story, Stim says, "I was at a Bullets basketball game last night and had to go drain the lizard. While I was standing there a guy came up to the urinal next to mine. When I looked over I recognized him. It was Warren Spahn the great Braves pitcher. I quoted some of his stats and said how much I would like to get his autograph and picture. He said OK. So we continued taking our leaks and then he autographed a piece of toilet paper and my friend outside took our picture. He went back to his seat and we went to ours. How cool is that?"

I ask, "Did you shake his hand?"

"Sure."

"Did you both wash after taking a leak?"

"Oh shit!" he said.

Anyway back to Ted Kennedy. A few years later I found myself in Washington National Airport late one evening waiting to catch a flight home. I was reading a book and passing time for the later than scheduled plane when an arriving flight from Boston caught my attention. Nearly everyone had cleared the exit ramp when these two big guys wearing top coats came out and sort of stationed themselves on each side of the door. Right behind them was another good sized guy wearing a trench coat with the belt tied at the

waist. The stern jaw was hard to miss. It was definitely Ted Kennedy and he was headed lickitly-split for the men's room.

I gave him about 30 seconds and followed him in. There were several empty urinals but there was no doubt what I was going to do. I choose the one next to the Senator.

If you are a man, taking a leak in a public restroom, all alone, and some guy walks up to the one next to you and unzip his trousers, you've got to look at him. It's impossible not to. Ted Kennedy was no exception. When he looked at me, I said, "good evening Senator. Are you having a good day?"

In the familiar Boston accent, he said, "yes, but it's good to get back to work." And he looked down at his work. By the time I came out of the restroom (after washing my hands), the senator and his staff were long gone. I couldn't wait to call Stim.

He stilled lived in Ft. Washington, MD, a local call from the airport. It was 9 o'clock when I got him on the phone. "Guess who I just took a leak with?"

"In this town it could be anyone. Who was it the President?"

"No," I said. "But he came close. It was Ted Kennedy. And unlike Warren Spahn, he washes his hands."

I have seen a number of famous people. Been close to many of them. But there is no doubt, none closer than Ted Kennedy.