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Furor over 'un-Australian toilet habits'

SACRAMENTO, CALIF., Feb. 05 (PinoyGlobal) - Little did Amador Bernabe realize that his "toilet habits" would propel him to international fame. For not cleaning himself up the "Australian way," he was unceremoniously fired from his job by his Australian employer. Bernabe, a 43 years old Filipino contract worker employed by Townsville Engineering Industries (TEI) in Townsville, Australia, got himself in trouble for using water instead of toilet paper after he used the toilet.

Last January 22, 2009, when Bernabe went to the toilet with a bottle of water, his foreman told him that he could not bring the bottle of water with him. Bernabe insisted and his foreman followed him to the toilet. Bernabe protested the invasion of his privacy and told his foreman, "It's my personal hygiene. I didn't break any law, I didn't break any rules of the company, why can't I do this?" His foreman told him that he can't do it and that he would report him to the manager.

The following day, Bernabe was called to the manager's office. The manager, Byron Carter, asked him what happened. After explaining what happened, Carter told him that if he didn't follow the "Australian way," he would be terminated from his job. Bernabe responded, "Sir, then you better terminate me." He was terminated.

Carter said that Bernabe was terminated because his toilet habits pose a "serious health risk." In his report, Carter wrote: "Mr. Bernabe's technique to cleanse

himself with water after his toiletry visits leaves the toilet cubical splashed with water, suspected to be contaminated with feces and wet soggy toilet paper lying on the floor. "Whoa!" Suspected to be contaminated with feces"??? Water splashed in toilet rooms happen all the time! That's why company restrooms are supposed to be cleaned up by janitors all the time. I used to work for companies where there were sheets posted daily on the restroom doors showing the times the restrooms were cleaned up, and signed by the janitors who cleaned them up. In my opinion, cleaning the restrooms is the ultimate responsibility of the employer.

The sacking of Bernabe sent shock waves around the world. The episode made it in USA TODAY and numerous newspapers in different countries. In Townsville, union bosses and politicians were angered by the apparent act of bigotry. "I think it is atrocious, an invasion of a person's rights and cultural beliefs," a union organizer said, "If it wasn't so disgusting it would almost be laughable."

Jenny Stirling, a spokeswoman for the Greens Party, praised Bernabe for what he did. "I commend the man for standing up for himself and I encourage the employer to have further talks with the union and the employee and I am sure common sense will prevail," she said. "I would like to see how Australians feel when they go to Europe where in places they don't have toilet paper."

Indeed, sooner or later, the use of toilet paper could

become a thing of the past. While the acceptable norm of "toilet hygiene" in many countries is the use of toilet paper, many people -- especially from Asian countries -- use water to clean themselves up after using the toilet. They believe that water cleanses, paper does not.

Using water for cleaning up has been around since the advent of mankind. In the 17th century, French furniture makers invented the bidet. The early models of bidet requires the person to ride it like a pony, which is "bidet" in French. A bidet is used for washing the private parts and anus. It has also been used for washing other parts of the body and for bathing babies.

In the Philippines, bidets are being sold in home improvement stores for more than 50 years. However, I have seen them only in affluent people's homes. When my family and I went on a European tour, the bidet was a common fixture in hotels. But in the U.S., I have yet to see a bidet in an American home although I've been to homes of some rich Americans. Americans use disposable paper in just about everything they do. Makes me wonder what's going to happen when all the trees in America are gone.

About 15 years ago, a friend of mine showed me an electric-powered toilet seat that he was selling. The seat has a heating element embedded around it for use in cold weather. Attached at the back of the seat is a 3-inch high rectangular casing which contains the mechanism for washing and drying your private parts. There is a retractable wand under the casing that is electrically controlled to move it to a position at the precise area to be washed. After the washing is completed, the drying unit

comes out to finish the job. It's hands free and the only thing that you touch is the control panel located on one side of the casing. It's made in Japan and the retail price was \$2,000 at that time. I have seen more recent models in the Internet selling for less than \$1,000 today.

A few days ago, I found another kind of sprayer in the Internet. It could be attached to a commode and used as a bidet, or it could be connected to a faucet or shower and used as a hand-held spray wand. The marketing blurb on this item is: "Go Green for Personal Hygiene. Cleansing with fresh running water is the most soothing and gentle way to remove germs and bacteria from your sensitive skin areas instead of using rough and abrasive tissue paper. Cleansing with fresh running water also reduces toilet paper use by 80%, which is an easy way to Go Green and save money."

The furor over Bernabe's "un-Australian toilet habits" could have a positive effect on the Green Revolution. It would remind us that there will come a time when everybody will learn to clean themselves with more water and less paper. With the forests vanishing rapidly, production of paper products could eventually come to a virtual end which would then be the beginning of a "paperless society."

We can do away with newspapers, paper bags, paper towels, paper napkins, writing papers, copy papers, etc. But are we ready to do away with toilet paper? That could be traumatic for a lot of people -- "What! no toilet paper? Oh, Lord! What am I going to use?" And Amador Bernabe would be there laughing, "Use water, brother. Ha ha ha..."

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