

# A FESTIVAL,



By Matthew Gibson



# A FORKLIFT AND POOP!

# Don't know if this is what you would consider "casual reading," but I do feel it necessary to issue a warning that it does involve a Festival, a forklift.....and poop. Yep, poop!

As some know, I produce events for a living, pretty big ones at that. The Kentucky Derby Festival's Opening Ceremonies Thunder Over Louisville, is the kick-off to the 70-events-in-two-weeks Kentucky Derby Festival that I work for that celebrates the Kentucky Derby. Thunder Over Louisville alone attracts almost 800,000 people for the nation's largest one-day fireworks show and all day air show.

As there isn't a venue in Kentucky (or anywhere for that matter) that can accommodate that type of crowd, we have to build it and build it fast. That includes everything from generated power to run the couple hundred merchandise booths and concession stands, install gargantuan sound systems, implement safety infrastructure to providing ample places for everyone to go to the bathroom and everything in between.

As you can imagine, it takes A LOT of port-a-johns to support that many people. So many in fact we have to bring them in from 3 states! The worst thing about this being a one day event is that on a "good weather year" where the crowd gets there very early, these bad boys reach "capacity" by early evening (you can use your imagination to figure it out).

Well, we had spectacular weather this particular year and after the event when we'd completely put downtown back together as if the event never happened (in record time I might add), the waste management company kept telling us that we were missing a single Port-a-John unit. How the heck were we missing a PJ unit I ask myself? We've lost a lot of equipment, had things stolen, destroyed things on a regular basis, etc., but never a PJ. Who would want one of those things?

We knew their numbers weren't off because we audit all the various services and equipment that show on the venue and our numbers matched prior to the show. We all wrote it off to bad removal accounting and moved on to implement the rest of the festival's 70 events.

Fast forward 8 or so \*hot\* days. Using a portion of the same venue as the fireworks/air show, we build a 9 day Chow Wagon, a big rockin' stage plus beer garden that sees roughly 10,000 people a day.

Towards the end of the Festival, I was sitting on my mobile people watcher (aka: golf cart), when a lovely young mother came rushing up to me carrying her daughter in a frantic state. This woman had a mixture of concern/disgust/revolt etc., on her face and I immediately popped into my whatever-this-lady-tells-me-I-need-to-get-it-fixed-immediately mode. Little did I know!

She proceeds to explain to me that she brought her family down to play in the funpark inflatables/jumpies/rockwall section of our venue and when they were eating earlier they saw what looked to be a "well-kept secret port-a-john" tucked way behind a HUGE outdoor sculpture in the park, no lines or anything!

Well you guessed it, she found the missing PJ. Upon hearing this, I ran to get my trusty forklift that we use for everything on our venues. In the meantime, some of my on-site team worked their way over to the area to keep anyone else from using the PJ because we were swamped at the time.

In my almost 13 years with the organization I've moved hundreds of PJ's so this wasn't going to take but a few minutes. Heck, the longest element should be just getting the forklift over to that end of the venue...

I pull up and the look on my co-workers face seemed to match that of the woman when she originally approached me. At that point I wasn't sure why, but I chalked it up to "sympathy" on their part for the young woman.

Instead of getting down and assessing the situation, I went ahead and lowered the forks, pulled up to the PJ's door and proceeded to slowly lift and tilt the unit (only so slightly as I knew this thing could be full) so it wouldn't slip off, again. Little did I know!

As I put the forklift in reverse I must have disturbed and awakened Beelzebub, Lucifer - Satan himself. As you can imagine after not only "supporting" its portion of an 800,000 person event, then sitting quietly for 9 days in the hot sun before being disturbed by my forklift, it had taken on what I would call a life of its own.

I honestly believe this thing had formed a "skin" if you will and when I moved it all hell broke loose and the most unimaginable, horrid odor with legs violently came forth. The multitude of curious people around at the time scattered like Godzilla was coming up behind me and they were in fear for their lives.

I thought "Ok, I gotta get this thing out of here, I can take it." That lasted for all of 1.4 seconds.

Unable to take it I bolted off of the forklift, weak kneed, gagging and sputtering, which caused the safety seat to kill the ignition. Anyone who has driven a forklift knows that when you break the connection on the safety seat, it doesn't come to a "smooth" stop, it jerks, pretty violently I might add. "Spillage" was now the key word and when I say this industrial waste smell had legs, I mean it. The odor was running yards away from this PJ and affecting 10's of people at a time. People I might add that had settled in for corn dogs, elephant ears, huge ice cream sundaes etc. On this gorgeous music filled night, they were all abandoning their goods, running, scooping up children and the infirm, trying to get clean air, any air.

The worst part? No not quite yet. I had to get \*back\* on the forklift and finish what I started, taking this thing on a long meandering ride throughout the venue that was continuing to fill up by the minute! I'm telling you, I've got a pretty strong stomach and have smelled some bad things in my life but this kept bringing me to tears, gagging, wrenching, red-eyed tears. I couldn't go 8-10 feet without retching and jumping off the moving forklift, at which time, as you guessed, it would jerk around and shake that thing up like a whipped poopie smoothie.

AT LEAST 45 minutes later, once my crew had completely abandoned me, I finally got this thing back into the service compound on the venue. I left the forklift where it sat, attached to the PJ and ran as far as I could to get clean air.

When I called the waste management company they informed me they'd come out ASAP to get this thing. When they showed up, this is no embellishment, the "techs" SUITED UP in hazmat like outfits and hoods so that they could address it properly! They said, if I remember correctly, that as a result of the hazardous type material, this unit would now be taken out of service! How bad does a poopie receptacle have to be to be taken out of service? I think I have a pretty good idea....

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