

(L) Tell us anything you think we should know.

-\$. I do some of my best thinking in the bathroom. I don't mean to embarrass anyone by talking about something so private, but it's probably a good thing for you to know in case we begin a four year relationship in which I'll have to do a lot of thinking.

The reason I'm going public with this announcement is that this fall I began to see I wasn't the only one who felt inspired and peaceful in that small room where we are alone with our bodies and our thoughts. My dad, for instance, calls it the reading room. He thinks he's joking, but I noticed the bathroom is actually the *only* place he reads now. He says he's just too busy to take time for luxuries like novels. (He means in his life outside the bathroom.) My other connection was learning last year in art history class that Toulouse Lautrec, the French painter, once wanted to hang his pictures in the men's room of a restaurant so they would be fully appreciated. "It is the most contemplative moment in a man's day," he said.

I've always tried to be a good son and a good student, and so for a while I followed Dad's example and Lautrec's suggestion and passed time in the bathroom by reading or looking at pictures. But that changed one day when Mom, in a cleaning frenzy, had cleared out all the magazines and books and I wound up in there alone with the tiles and the towels. Pretty soon I got tired of reading the monograms on the face cloths and turned to the window, which looks out over a bit of lawn toward a few trees beside our house. Seated (I promise not to be crude), I wasn't thinking of anything except how bored I was. Then suddenly I was thinking of many things at once: a good opening paragraph for my history paper, a new way to look at a chemistry problem I'd been working on, even the perfect gift for my girlfriend's birthday, just to mention the more practical. I also had other thoughts rushing across my mind like clouds in a windy sky: the meaning of long-forgotten conversations, sudden connections between very different ideas. It came out of nowhere and it was exhilarating. I felt like a philosopher. Since then I haven't read a word in there; I just assume the pose of Rodin's Thinker and let it happen. I guess some of it may be just physiology (Dad says I have an "awesome metabolism"), but there's more to it than that, a fact I learned when I once tried bringing a pad in to make some notes; it only ruined the spell. Sometimes now I write down what I can remember afterward, but the thinking I do^r in the bathroom is pure and undistracted, and the way to do it is to do nothing.

I get the sense from news programs I've seen that

world leaders don't spend enough time in the bathroom, let alone do much thinking there. Like my dad, they're just too busy with realities to afford the luxury of pure reflection. As a result, I don't hear many exhilarating thoughts coming out of world leaders these days, nothing that shows much imagination or excitement. Just the same old deadlock on the same deadly issues. They're always flying around the world, sending guns or warnings to one another, disrupting their digestions and never taking the time between all those briefings to sit down and make peace with their own biology, never mind with other countries. Even when they're home, security reasons probably prevent them from having bathrooms with much of a view. I bet the White House even has a telephone in the bathroom. That would be the worst. Maybe that's why world leaders all look so constipated, even when they smile.

I think we'd all be better off if once a day we pumped all the heads of state full of apple cider—Dad says it's "nature's laxative"—and locked them for twenty minutes in small rooms with a good view of some trees, or a hill, or a pond, or a bird's nest, away from telephones and briefings and realities. Maybe they'd think of something.