Everybody Poops

By Mel Lavine

Special to the Times

When I was an undergraduate at the University of Maine, a forestry professor – he was also a cousin – knowing of my interest in writing, wondered why people in the novels he'd ever read never went to the toilet. They maim, murder, mate and so on – but rarely if ever is there a word said about the one activity all humanity has in common, day in and day out.

The Lady Friend shook her head. There's a popular children's book, "Everybody Poops," that's been around for years, she said. It's about animals and people and how they do their business. She'd read it with one of her grandchildren when he was small. "We both loved it and learned a lot," she remembered.

But the Lady Friend, a relentless reader of fiction, cannot cite an instance in the procession of characters that has moved across her pages over the years where a character has ever paused to poop.

I would not have brought this up except for my own recent experience. Although I've been OK I am piling up the years. It's been four scores and four years ago since I joined the human comedy. My doctor thought it time to have a closer look, and ordered up a battery of lab tests, including one that would replace a colonoscopy, a sample deposit of poop.

Dutifully, I visited the lab where I was given a kit to take a sample collection.

At home I followed the directions, placed the supplied collection paper inside the toilet bowl on top of the water – sat down and waited. Nothing. Less than a minute passed – and the paper sank under the water.

"Do you suppose a newspaper would work better?" I asked the Lady Friend,

“You can try,” she said.

On second thought we decided the ink on the newspaper might ruin the test – to say nothing of clogging the toilet. The medics must know what they’re doing. I placed another collection paper inside the bowl hoping for a miracle. But my best efforts went for naught, again.

Humbled and ashamed, I returned to the lab the next day. Without a word of reproach, the techs handed me another kit. This time I was determined not to be intimidated. I’ve heard many people don’t go through with the exercise. They may not want to know what’s inside their colons or they may shrink from scooping poop.

Be that as it may, the following day I returned in triumph to the lab.

It’s true that everybody poops – novels notwithstanding – but not always on demand.

Mel Lavine was a television producer for many years with NBC News and CBS News in New York. Contact him at his e-mail address: mellavine@aol.com.