

Freddy Fletcher's Flatulence

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Freddy Fletcher's Flatulence
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It is rare, indeed, for any human being to go through life without suffering one health-related ailment or another. Fact is, from ointment in the eyes shortly after birth to pills to prevent osteoporosis at old age, most people endure a steady stream of examinations, medications, supplements and treatments all in the name of good health. For Freddy Fletcher, however, his first eleven years went by without as much as a sniffle or a bruised shin. Then he turned twelve.

Freddy's "problem" began shortly after his 12th birthday party. Freddy and three of his best friends spent that sunny summer Saturday at *Satan's Burning Rubber Go-Cart Track and Village of Horrors Amusement Park*—a gift from Freddy's parents—which included a party lunch of sausage pizzas, nachos, sodas, cake and ice cream. The boys spent several hours having a hell of a good time, until Freddy's parents finally returned to pick them up.

After the last of Freddy's friends exited his mother's mini van, the first sign of trouble to come arose from the back seat. Well, specifically, from Freddy. It could have been written off as a bare-legged rub against the leather seat. The sound was very

similar. But almost immediately a stench filled the vehicle causing Freddy's father to swerve off the road, nearly hitting a garbage can that was left near the street from the previous day's trash pick up.

"Oh dear, what is that smell?" questioned Freddy's mother as she pulled a handkerchief from her purse and covered her nose and mouth.

Freddy's father frantically attempted to navigate back into his lane.

"I dunno," offered Freddy in a defensive tone which, in and of itself should have foretold of bad things to come. You see Freddy and nearly any other boy his age, would normally burst with pride and demand a trophy for creating an odor that could cause their father to drive off the road. But Freddy simply sat there, somewhat stunned and wishing he, too, had something other than his hands to cover his own nose and mouth.

"God Almighty, save us all," Freddy's father finally exhaled between his clenched teeth as he lowered his window and leaned his head out into the wind like a golden retriever.

Freddy's mother craned her neck in the direction of the back seat to face him. "Was that you?" she cried through her handkerchief, her eyes wide but blinking back tears.

"I guess so," was all Freddy could manage.

"God Almighty," Freddy's father repeated as he assumed the proper driving position. His eyes were beginning to water, too. Using the power controls on his door, he lowered every side window on the mini van. Then he retracted the moon roof. The wind whistled through the vehicle. The stench wouldn't budge.

No one spoke again for the remainder of the ride home. Rather than pulling into the garage, Freddy's father parked in the driveway and left all the windows open. Everyone had their door open and was clamoring to get out even before the engine was shut off.

Freddy's mother staggered a couple of steps to the side lawn and bent over. She held her handkerchief tightly over her mouth and fought to keep from barfing. After a hard swallow or two, she was able to straighten up. Freddy had disappeared into the house. Freddy's father was walking in circles, taking deep breaths.

That night was, for the most part, sleepless for the Fletcher family. The August heat would normally demand that the central air conditioning be kept running full bore until the pre-dawn hours brought welcomed respite. Freddy's flatulence trumped convention, however. One little rip in the close quarters of the kitchen caused his sister, Emily, to vomit into the sink. Unable to hold his sphincter, Freddy soon stunk up every room into which he ventured until he was banned to his bedroom for the balance of the evening. It was then necessary to open every window of the house and Freddy's father hauled down two old fans from the attic in an attempt to force the putrid air outside. It didn't work and the Fletchers endured the long night tossing and turning in their sweat-soaked beds.

"Now I know what it's like to sleep in an outhouse," Freddy's father muttered as he rolled out of bed the next morning. Freddy's mother showed no signs of hearing him. Her head remained buried under a pillow. A few moments later, though, she joined her husband who was shaving in front of the bathroom mirror.

Holding her nightgown over her mouth, Freddy's mother mumbled, "Do you think we should take Freddy to see a doctor?"

"I'll see how he's doing when I wake him up to get ready for church," said Freddy's father. "Hopefully, whatever was in his system has worked its way out."

Just then, Freddy stuck his head in the bathroom doorway. "Good morning," said Freddy, "I heard what you said and I really do feel a lot better."

"No killer farts this morning, Freddy?" his father asked sternly.

"What a disgusting way to ask your son a question," Freddy's mother chirped in from behind a wad of nightgown. "Freddy, dear, when was the last time you passed gas, sweetheart?"

"Gee, mom, I think it was before I went to bed last night," Freddy replied.

"Thank God!" Freddy's mother exclaimed. "I still want you to take more Beano before we leave for church, though, okay?"

"Sure mom," Freddy shot back cheerily. "Is it okay to take it with my cereal?"

"Maybe you should just have dry toast this morning, pal," said Freddy's father.

"But I'm really hungry, dad!" Freddy cried.

“Your father is probably right, Freddy,” said his mother, “We’ll have a nice meal for lunch and that’ll give your system a couple more hours to recover.”

Freddy slouched and turned to leave the room. “Oh, alright,” he said dejectedly.

Later that morning Freddy’s mother led the family to their usual pew in church; first row, center aisle, immediately in front of the lectern behind which Pastor Butterfield delivered his weekly sermon. With a fair number of elderly congregants—most suffering the usual age-induced vision and hearing impairments—the front pews tended to fill in and this Sunday was no exception.

Before long, the notes from the final hymn had echoed off the stained glass windows and, following an emotional prayer seeking help and guidance for the nation’s president, Pastor Butterfield began his sermon. And that’s when Freddy’s problem returned. Silent. And deadly.

Sitting motionless next to his father, Freddy provided no advance warning. Though he was aware of the...err...*slippage*, the fear of God left him frozen in his pew. Horrified, Freddy’s father and mother each sat up rigidly and feigned excessive interest in the sermon. When the stench reached his little sister, however, she quickly buried her head in her mother’s lap.

The reaction to the fumes spread like a ripple in a pond following a pebble hitting the water. People all around began sniffing and turning their heads ever so slightly, afraid that excessive movement might make them suspect. The odor grew as did Freddy’s discomfort. Freddy’s father moved one hand onto Freddy’s thigh, clamped down hard and whispered, “No more, Freddy. Please.”

Unable to control himself, the next burst was clearly, horrifyingly audible.

Fffrrrraaaappppppppppppp!

“Dear God, boy!” Pastor Butterfield exclaimed from the lectern.

“Freddy!” screeched his mother.

Freddy, now a purplish shade of red pulled his legs up onto the pew and hid his face between his knees. “I can’t stop it!” he cried. And he couldn’t.

Ttttthhhuuuuuurrrrrrbbpppppppp!! The people in the balcony heard that one.

An elderly man five rows back turned to his wife, “I told you it wasn’t me!”

Congregants young and old attempted to flee. Those closest to Freddy couldn't get out in time and when a well-dressed woman with blue hair launched her breakfast between the splayed fingers over her mouth, a chain reaction ensued. Freddy's mother puked. Then his sister. Even Pastor Butterfield bent over behind the lectern and modestly tried to hide behind his robe as he barfed.

While two heart attacks and one broken hip were attributed to Freddy's flatulence, it was a miracle that no one died in that or the seven other churches and public places where similar scenes played out that morning. It seems Freddy was one of 43 children who contracted a rare form of intestinal bacterial reaction all traced back to the sausage pizza served at *Satan's Burning Rubber Go-Cart Track and Village of Horrors Amusement Park* the previous day.

It took a full week for the symptoms to disappear completely and fumigation tents—normally reserved for pest extermination—covered several houses throughout the community in desperate efforts to expunge residual odor from homes of the afflicted. Since that fateful Sunday, the Fletchers sit in the back pew at church. Except for the occasional unaware guest, most congregants keep their distance, forever in fear of Freddy Fletcher's flatulence.

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