



Introduction

This book began as a graduate thesis at the Slippery Rock University Master of Science in Sustainable Systems program in northwestern Pennsylvania in the mid-1990s. I had been living “off the grid” for ten years and had been using a compost toilet system of my own design for fifteen years. Nothing fancy, very simple, but I wanted to research what was going on with my system, so I chose my toilet as the subject of my thesis.

I never turned the thesis in to my thesis committee, and I never finished the master’s program. Instead, I converted the manuscript into “popular” language (rather than “academic” language) and then self-published it as an amateur book. I wanted to learn how to self-publish. This was before the internet, even before personal computers, if you can imagine. No cell phones either. I started writing with a pen

and paper and advanced to a manual typewriter, and then an electronic typewriter when they became available. I assembled my first computer on the floor of my office in 1995, the year the first edition of the *Humanure Handbook* was published.

Although I found the book's subject matter fascinating, I didn't think anyone else would be interested, so I only printed six hundred copies of the book and assumed I would be staring at them for the rest of my life, collecting cobwebs stacked in my garage, passing a book out here and there as time went by to whoever would take one. The book could always be used for emergency toilet paper, I told them.

Well, I was wrong. The first edition sold ten thousand copies rather quickly, so I wrote a second edition. It sold just as well, so I condensed and redesigned it into a third edition. Now, with eighty thousand copies in print, I'm doing the 3rd printing of the fourth edition. The various editions were translated into 23 languages. The first translation was published in South Korea, the second Israel, and then editions came out in French, Norwegian, Portuguese, Finnish, Chinese, Japanese, Polish, and partial translations in Cambodian, Dutch, German, Hungarian, Italian, Kenyan, Mongolian, Russian, Slovenian, Spanish, and Vietnamese. I gave the foreign rights on request, asking little, if anything, in return.

In the years the book circulated, I continued to make compost from "humanure," and I continued to refine and tweak my methodology as my experience and knowledge grew. My first ever compost pile was in 1975. My first ever humanure compost pile was in 1976. Now, as I write this forty-six years later, I have never *not* had a compost pile, or several, and I have always used humanure as a feedstock for the compost. I have also used all the finished compost to grow my food (some has gone to houseplants), and I have raised a healthy family on my garden produce.

I now realize that we as a nation are *shit illiterate*. Any society that grows up with water toilets, also called flush toilets, seems to have an arrested development when it comes to the recycling of organic material, especially what comes from its own bodies.

My compost-related travels opened my eyes to a lot of things, es-

pecially when traveling to those parts of the world where people don't use toilets because they don't have them. Americans make up about 4 percent of the human population, meaning that 96 percent of all people are not Americans, and they don't think and act like Americans. About two and a half *billion* of those people don't have water toilets. They never had flush toilets, their ancestors before them never had flush toilets going back to the beginning of time, and quite likely, their descendants after them will also never have flush toilets. The infrastructure, water, and wealth required for flush toilets simply do not exist in much of the world. There must be something else for them — a different way to have a toilet. Most flush toilet people don't care about any of this; they can't understand the acuteness and immensity of the global sanitation problem, and they have little constructive advice to offer.

This improbable book has taken me to Mongolia three times. It has taken me to Haiti four times, Finland four times, Morocco, Mozambique, Nicaragua, India, Tanzania, Kenya, Uganda, and from coast to coast in the USA and into Canada. I have turned down many invitations to travel the world to help people, schools, or villages get compost toilet systems started because there just aren't enough days in the year, and I have a garden to tend at home. I don't know how many more countries I will travel to before my life ends, but I suspect that my traveling is not over yet.

My challenge with the fourth edition of this book was to try to distill over forty years of experience into as few pages as possible. I also needed to update and correct some of the language I had used in previous versions. I have learned so much, and it seems so important, that I believe the effort is worth it. There's no way I can write what I've learned in only one book, so I published another book in 2021, *The Compost Toilet Handbook*. It focuses more narrowly on the compost toilet and is intended for a more international audience. It is full of color photos (a picture is worth a thousand words), and is expected to be easier to translate. Look for it at CompostToiletHandbook.com.

Joe Jenkins, April 2021

ATTENTION EARTHLINGS, I AM GIRDLOK...
FROM THE PLANET TURDNOK IN THE
CONSTELLATION ALPHA ROMEO. WE HAVE
DISCOVERED AN ANCIENT
MANUSCRIPT IN ONE OF OUR
ARCHEOLOGICAL RUINS, AMAZINGLY
IT IS WRITTEN IN EARTHLING
ENGLISH AND IT IS ABOUT YOUR
ODOROUS EXCRETIONS.
IT IS CALLED THE HUMANURE
HANDBOOK AND IT IS THE
KEY TO THE SPIRITUAL
SALVATION OF YOUR PITIFULLY
INSIGNIFICANT SPECIES.
AS AN ACT OF INTERGALACTIC
GOOD WILL WE HAVE CHOSEN
TO PUBLISH AND DISTRIBUTE
THIS BOOK ON EARTH.
WE ASK FOR NOTHING
IN RETURN ETC... ETC...
DRIBBLE... DRIBBLE...

