

## Linda's Logic

(By: jericoholic42)

Linda and Susan had been best friends for years. They and their respective husbands had gone to college together, they'd done all the usual couple things together as newlyweds, and then, when they became parents, their kids grew up together. Now, Linda's son was twelve and Susan's son was thirteen and with the husbands off at work, and the boys off at school, Linda and Susan found themselves spending most days together talking about the world, parenting, and life in general. It was on one of these typical days that the subject of swearing came up. Linda was lamenting the particularly busy afternoon she'd had the day before...

"So then after picking up Stanley for soccer practice, we ran to the store and picked up some things, then we came home and I gave him his annual mouth-washing, and then it was almost time for dinner so..."

Susan did a double-take. "Wait, you did what?"

"Well," Linda said, "I washed his mouth out with soap. You know, a little scrub-a-dub..."

"Oh no!" Susan said smiling, "What did he say?"

"Say?" Linda asked, clearly puzzled.

"Yeah, what swear word did he use?" Susan asked.

"Oh," Linda said with a laugh, "I don't know. How would I know that?"

Now Susan had gone from puzzled to downright confused and it was written all over her face.

"Well..." Linda said, "Susan dear... Of course he knows better than to swear in front of me, but that doesn't mean he doesn't do it."

Susan's mouth hung open a little, as though she were looking for words but unable to find them.

"You mean to tell me," Linda queried, "That you don't regularly wash William's mouth out?"

"Well no," Susan said, "He's never said anything that warranted it."

Linda laughed hysterically at this. "Oh my goodness, you silly girl. William is thirteen! You're telling me you honestly believe that he's NEVER said a dirty word in his life? Not at school? Not out playing with the other boys?"

"Well of course not, but I certainly can't just punish him for something I didn't see or hear him doing," Susan said.

"Look," Linda explained, "Every now and again, not like every week or anything, but every now and again, I grab a bar of Caress or the liquid soap or whatever I feel like, and I wash Stanley's mouth out. Because he's a little boy, and little boys swear because it makes them feel like big boys. It's just a fact of life. Doing any less just teaches them that swearing is ok and consequence-free so long as we're not around to hear it."

Strangely, Susan found herself completely unable to argue this logic.

By that afternoon, when Susan heard William's school bus pulling up the street, she had not been able to convince herself that William had never, in the thirteen years of his life, said a dirty word. And so she stood there in the bathroom, brand-new bar of Ivory soap in hand, wondering if she was crazy, or if she'd just never opened her eyes before. Either way, all of Linda's little pieces of advice were bouncing around in Susan's head, and she was trying to make sense of it before William arrived.

As it turned out, Linda had been very practiced in the subtle art of mouth-washing, and probably knew every way to do that there was. There were quick ways, long ways, ways to do it two-handed, one-handed, or no-handed; ways to do it to an uncooperative child, ways to do it to a cooperative child, and so on and so-forth. And in his twelve years, though mostly in the last three, little Stanley had experienced just about all of them, mostly because Linda had a great deal of time to think of new ways to do it, and was always eager to try something new, if for no other reason than to keep it from becoming one more boring and monotonous household chore for her to do. Linda had washed Stanley's mouth with out with Ivory, Caress, Berry Fusion Caress, white Dove, pink Dove, Dial, Irish Spring, Zest, Coast, Camay, and Olay.

The previous day's mouth-washing had added Ivory Aloe to the list, and those were just the bars. The liquid list consisted of Ivory, Softsoap, Dial and a couple of different dish soaps. Once, Linda had even found herself in a bathroom that had run out of soap, and so, rather than walk all the way across the house, she discovered a brand new use for Pantene right then and there. Various brands aside, Susan had previously had no idea how many different ways there were to actually perform the act itself. You could use the bar, your fingers, a washrag, a toothbrush... It went on and on!

"So," Susan thought to herself as she heard William walk through the front door, "How am I going to go about this?"

"Mom, I'm home!" William yelled as he dropped his book-bag on the floor.

"I'm in the bathroom, could you come here a minute?" Susan hollered back as she grabbed a washcloth out of a cabinet and turned the sink faucet on.

William walked into the bathroom, where the sink faucet was running, but his mom was nowhere to be seen.

"Mom?" William asked. A second later, he heard the door shut behind him. He turned to see his mother standing there, lathering up a washcloth with a bar of Ivory soap. "What did you need? What's going on?"

"William," Susan explained, "You know how I raised you to wash yourself really good, so you didn't walk around dirty all the time?"

"Yeah," William said, now himself very puzzled.

"Well," his mother continued, "There is one part of you that I never washed for you when you were little, and is thus likely to be very dirty."

William was now just as confused as Susan had been herself earlier in the day.

"I need to wash out your mouth, William," Susan said matter-of-factly as she continued to twist the bar of soap around inside the washcloth.

"What? But I haven't—!" William began to protest.

"Now look," Susan interrupted, "You're thirteen and I don't think you can stand there and truthfully tell me that you're NEVER said a swear word, so I don't want you to end up adding lying to your list of crimes, ok? Now I'm going to do this no matter what, so instead of thinking that you're getting punished for not doing anything, I want you to think of it as having your mouth washed out for all of the times you've sworn and I didn't hear you. This is probably going to become a regular ritual for us too, so you may as well just accept it and let me do what needs to be. It'll be a lot easier that way, believe me."

Amazingly, William also found himself completely unable to argue this new logic, and thus surrendered when his mother approached him the soap cloth. She set the bar itself down and grabbed the sides of his face with her left hand. William, obviously and understandably very nervous, never took his eyes off of her right hand, which held the cloth.

And then Susan began washing. She started first with the outside of William's mouth, thinking that if at first the whole thing did not seem as bad as her son had imagined it to be, that he might relax long enough for her to wash what REALLY needed to be washed. It worked, at least to a degree, as the seconds went by, and William realized that this wasn't all that different from washing his own face. Maybe, he thought, his mother had some half-cocked definition of "washing your mouth out," or perhaps he'd just misunderstood her entirely.

He hadn't, of course, as he discovered when Susan used her fingers to push the washcloth into Stanley's mouth. Not only that, but it was indeed just as bad as he'd imagined it would be, and probably even worse. The soap taste hit him almost immediately, as Susan worked the cloth all around the inside of his mouth. Across his tongue, the roof of his mouth, the sides, under the tongue, everywhere. At one point she pulled the cloth out, leading William to think that the whole ting was over, but it wasn't. She merely re-positioned her fingers underneath the cloth so

that she could then push a still-soapy part of it back inside his mouth.

After Susan was convinced that she'd thoroughly corrected any past oversights, she allowed William to rinse, patted him on the head and then left the bathroom to get started on dinner.

And so it came to pass that William had his mouth washed out for the very first of what became a good many times. Though his own mother never became quite as experimental as Stanley's had, she did become very adept with a bar of Ivory soap. (And the occasional bar of Caress) But those are other stories, for other times.