



By Jerry Sowden

Joseph Jenkins stirs table scraps into one of his compost bins outside his Barkeyville area home.

# Protest carves unusual life path

**A Grove City man has written "Humanure" — an alternative for the elimination of human waste products.**

**By KAREN CLARK**  
Staff writer

A journey that began as a young man's protest of the Vietnam War encountered unforeseen curves and paved a life path that is making waves across the world today.

Joseph Jenkins of Grove City is the author of several books, including the "Slate Roof Bible" and most recently, "Humanure." It is the latter publication, which has been translated into five languages, that has called Jenkins all over the world to explain his system of composting human fecal material and urine.

The concept may seem a little too unappetizing to digest. However, solid scientific principals of microbiology make the idea not only feasible but functional and economic as an alternative for the elimination of human waste products.

Experts agree that human manure is a major source of environmental pollution around the world. In addition, it is also a source of disease organisms and when discarded as a waste material into the environment creates pollution and threatens public health.

Applying raw sewage, or night soil, to agricultural land is practiced in many areas of the world, but is strongly discouraged due to disease and pollution, Jenkins said.

A viable alternative is through a process called composting, which is used by the Humanure compost toilet system Jenkins developed during a 10-year period of "voluntary

simplicity" he imposed on himself as "a legal way to not support the Vietnam War."

"I did not believe Vietnam was right and it was funded by tax dollars. So, I took a vow not to make money above the poverty level so I would not contribute to the war," he said.

The year was 1970 and Jenkins was a college student opposed to the situation in Vietnam.

"I was 18 and would have been drafted if I wasn't in college. I was in with the last semester of students to receive an exemption," he said.

The son of a career military man, Jenkins was born in Germany and grew up all over the world. When his parents returned to their native Butler after retirement, Jenkins would settle close by near Barkeyville.

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# Author credits simplicity for book's popularity

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"When I moved here, for the first 10 years I did not have electric and running water. This process (of composting) was developed by necessity during that time," he said with a wry grin.

Despite his efforts in living a simple, uncomplicated life on a low economic scale, Jenkins found that he achieved just the opposite.

"I was living in abject simplicity and now we have six computers. In trying not to make money, it had a boomerang effect and now we have a very successful business," he said.

Jenkins first began working on Humanure while teaching at a local university.

"The process seemed to work quite well, but I never did the research on why it worked until I began working on my thesis. I never did turn that in for credit, it was published as a book," he said.

The first printing of Humanure was self-published in 600 copies, and due to the unusual subject matter, Jenkins said the story was picked up by the Associated Press a week later.

"I could only afford a limited number of copies and assumed no one would read it. Then, people took interest in it right away," he said.

One reason for the popularity of the concept may be its simplicity.

"It's pretty hard to screw it up. The process is so simple that I've

seen people be completely irresponsible using it and it still works," he said.

Jenkins said that research into the scientific principles shows human pathogens are destroyed in roughly about one hour at a temperature of 120 degrees.

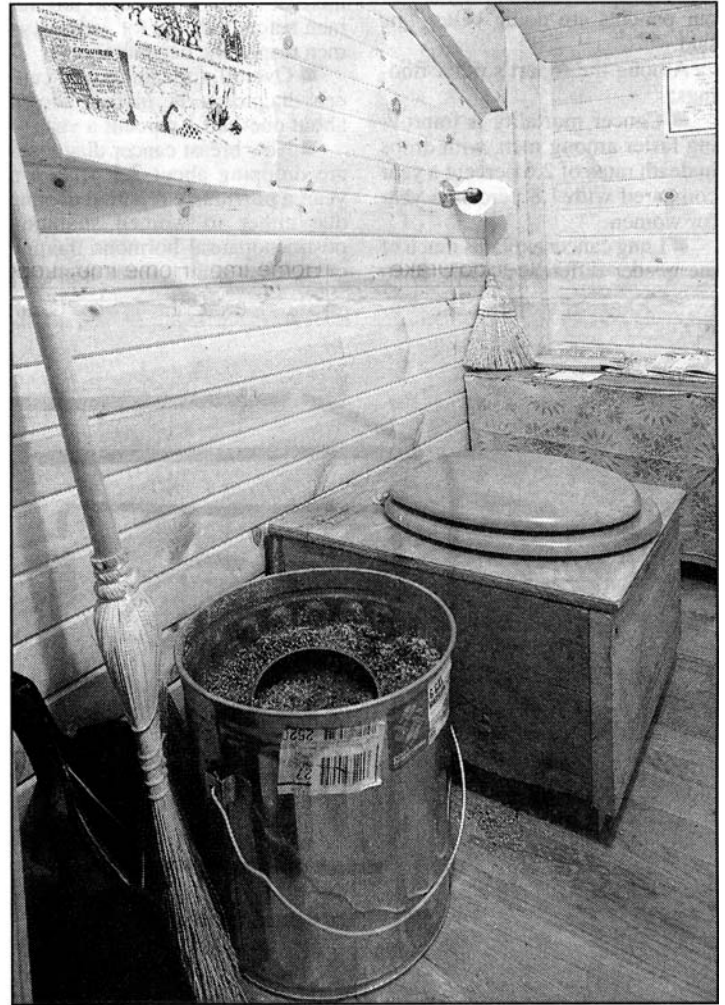
"We have used this system for 28 years and grown all of our own garden food. We've never had the slightest bit of problems. In fact, just the opposite — my kids have never even had an earache," he said.

Walking through Jenkins' home and business areas where the composting systems are in use, five-gallon buckets of sawdust in the restroom areas are the only visible signs of an alternative sewage system in use. There is no detectable odor, insects or other signs that would indicate anything other than a normal environment.

Jenkins book is free on the Internet to anyone interested in applying the concept to their lives. It has been translated into five languages and work is under way on several others.

The simple, inexpensive design has traveled around the world as people search for viable alternatives to economic and social issues.

"The barrier is not a practical one because of the simplicity, but it is a psychological one. ... Nature has got it already figured out, we are the ones that don't," Jenkins said.



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**A small toilet without the addition of plumbing and a bucket of sawdust complete the fixtures of a restroom in the corner of Joseph Jenkins' office near Barkeyville.**