

Do you know the janitor's story?

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William Crawford was certainly an unimpressive figure, one easily overlooked on a hectic day at the U.S. Air Force Academy. He was a janitor there from 1970 to 1997, quietly moving about the facilities, mopping and buffing floors, emptying trash cans, cleaning toilets, or just tidying up the mess that college-age kids can leave in a dormitory.

Sadly, for many years, few of the cadets gave him much notice, maybe a passing nod or a curt "G'morning" in his direction as cadets hurried off to their daily duties. Not many cadets really noticed him because he did his job so well. With the academy almost always spotlessly clean, no one ever got involved to help him and he was certainly taken for granted. After all, cleaning toilets was his job and not theirs. This, coupled with his slow movements and elderly gray appearance, made him blend into the woodwork until one day...

On a fall Saturday afternoon in 1976, cadet James Moschgat was reading a book about World War II and the tough Allied ground campaign in Italy, when he stumbled across an incredible story. On September 13, 1943, a Private William Crawford from Colorado, assigned to the 36th Infantry Division, had been involved in some bloody fighting on Hill 424 near Altavilla, Italy.

Moschgat recalled that the words on the page leapt out at him: "...in the

face of intense and overwhelming hostile fire...with no regard for personal safety... on his own initiative, Private Crawford single-handedly attacked fortified enemy positions...for conspicuous gallantry and intrepidity at risk of life above and beyond the call of duty, the President of the United States..."

He took the book to his fellow cadets and confronted their janitor about the story, asking if he was the private referenced in the story. Crawford confirmed that it was, indeed, him.

Wow! None of the cadets could believe it. Their janitor was a Medal of Honor recipient! From that day forward their opinions of the janitor changed. They didn't leave messes for him to clean up. They tidied up the bathrooms. They invited him to all of their formal functions.

William Crawford, when he was an Army private, risked his life to single-handedly take out two German machine-gun nests in order to save the lives of the men in his platoon who were under heavy gunfire. He was, however, captured a few days later during another battle and was thought to be dead.

The Medal of Honor was presented "posthumously" to his father on February 26, 1944. His family learned later that he was alive and was a prisoner of war. He returned home in 1945 when American prisoners were liberated near the end of the war.

It goes to show you never really know who the janitor may be or was. We see

janitors all the time and presume things about them that are probably nowhere near what or who they really are.

When I was a kid, my grammar school janitor went by the name of Iggy. He was a burly old guy who always had a burning cigar dangling from his mouth. Us kids never paid much attention to him other than the fact we could smell his lingering cigar odor. In fact, we often made fun of him because of that. No one ever talked to him but every now and then he'd yell at one of us: "Get away from there!"

One day my teacher told us that Iggy spent his whole adult working life in the Peace Corps, training people in third world countries to become self sufficient in the construction of homes and buildings. He retired and became our janitor.

From that day forward I had a different opinion of Iggy. I never knew his real name but somehow grew to respect him in a whole different way. We opened doors for him when we saw him coming, stopped making fun of him, and we quit spitting our gum out on the school grounds for him to scrape up.

So you never know. When you see a janitor hard at work, don't assume they have nothing to offer the world other than keeping floors and toilets clean. They most likely have a story. Find out what their story is. They may possess some untapped wisdom you could greatly benefit from.

~ The End ~