



Dirty Canals Story By: Andrew Frinkle

It had rained ceaselessly. The yards were all soggy, the streets had become shallow lakes in all the low spots, and the drainage ditches formed moats around people's yards. It was muggy, marshy, and buggy outside. All-in-all, it was pretty gross out.

Gross was what Benny liked. He loved running around in the water. He got out his boogie board, what he used when he was in the ocean swimming, and he ran out to the nearest puddles. Along the end of the driveway, there was a puddle several inches deep that ran along the perimeter of his yard. As he ran, he threw the board ahead of him, jumped on it, and skimmed across the water. He got soaking, sopping wet, but it was fun. His shoes made squelching noises as the wet soaks contracted and expanded with his steps. It was messy fun, surfing the runoff. He worked his way over to the lowest part of the yard, a ditch along the end of the yard, where the asphalt had dumped all its water. It was far too much water for the ground to absorb quickly, so it had pooled up like a pond at that corner of the yard. It was at least ankle deep, maybe partway up his shin here and there.

Benny skidded across the water, hydroplaning on his makeshift surfboard. A wave splashed out away from the epicenter of his landing, and a rooster tail of spray arced over the roadway. He laughed as he crashed down to his knees, soaking up his front. He was drenched to the waist now, and looking for more!

He found it down the street, where the city's canals were. All the rainwater that didn't evaporate or sink into the ground made its way to the system of canals and drainage ditches that ran throughout the city. They were a good six foot deep usually, and eight to ten across in most spots. He was amazed to see them nearly full. They usually only had a trickle of water running through them, enough to keep them muddy. Now, it was a rushing torrent of water, all fed by water running down each street into the canals. Little rivulets joined with the canals that had become like rivers.

It was, of course, too big of a temptation to resist for a thrill-seeker like Benny. He took one look at it and made up his mind. He charted the narrowest spot in the canal and took off full tilt. Again, with the boogie board thrown in front of him, he skated across the rushing water. There was a heart-stopping moment where it looked like he might just carry all the way across on momentum, but it was short-lived.

Benny ended up fully submerged in the rushing runoff, a skuzzy bath of all that had washed down the streets and through people's yards. Fertilizers, animal waste, yard clippings, trash from alongside the roads - they were his bath mates. It was filthy. It was horribly dirty, and he regretted his decision the moment he came up spluttering on the other side, clutching his board.

As he clawed his way through the sodden soil and muddy earth onto the other side of the canal, he knew he'd made an error in judgment. He marched home, stinking of waste water. A foul taste was in his mouth from where he'd accidentally gulped in a bit of water as he splashed down. It was no real surprise a couple days later when he came down with a nice rash on his skin and a pretty bad illness.

After that, he avoided playing in dirty water and especially filthy canals.

Use the information in the story to answer the questions below.

1. CHOOSE THE BEST ANSWER: What is Benny doing?
A. He is playing at the beach. B. He is surfing
C. He is playing in the puddles and water after the rain. D. He is kite boarding.
2. How would you BEST describe Benny's personality?
A. He's a thrill-seeker. B. He's nerdy. C. He's an indoor sort. D. He's a comedian.
3. What are the three places Benny does most of his playing?
A. the canal, the lake, and the pond B. the pond, the canal, and the street
C. by the driveway, at the end of the yard, and the canal D. by the driveway, in the canal, and in the neighbor's yard
4. What does Benny use to surf the water?
A. a surfboard B. a body board C. a paraglider D. a boogie board
5. What does it take to get Benny to learn his lesson?
A. a broken wrist B. a rash and an illness C. a concussion D. He doesn't learn his lesson.

