

Before Facebook, there was the public toilet wall

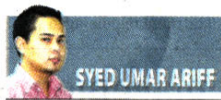
LONG before there were social networking sites like Facebook and Twitter, people had to make do with public toilets.

Toilet walls serve more than just to ensure privacy. They were a primitive communication medium. There is "art" scrawled there, as well as phone numbers.

It is the way some people made new friends. It is an entertaining and worthwhile activity for a lot of people.

The same can sometimes be found on the backseat of buses, but it is difficult to leave lengthy descriptions about yourself there.

On toilet walls, however, there is space even to leave replies.



These are usually scribbled using permanent black or blue ink, to ensure janitors don't wipe them off.

For example, there could be a civic reminder: "Please do not discard cigarette butts into the toilet bowl."

Followed by the helpful reply: "*Suka hati aku la nak buang kat mana. Bukan rokok kau pun*" (I'll throw them anywhere I want. They're not your cigarettes anyway.)

That is probably the an-



People have been reunited with lost relatives through toilet wall graffiti.

cedent of "wall-to-wall" messaging now available on Facebook.

There have been cases of people reunited with long-lost family members and friends thanks to messages posted on public toilet doors.

A friend once said she found out where her rebellious sister was after a visit to the public toilet. The sister had been missing from home for a week.

The sister had left her new mobile phone number on the door, where she described herself as "hot, sexy and open-minded". My friend recognised the handwriting.

Responses to the posts may be awfully slow — sometimes days may pass before there is a reply — but that is only to be expected. This was the olden

days after all, when things moved at a slower pace.

Most times, the posts will be the phone numbers of girls, put up there by disgruntled boyfriends.

Those who tried calling usually did not get past the girl's mother. Not a good start for wannabe players, but everyone has to start somewhere.

This ancient form of social networking is still alive today despite the advent and progress of information technology.

Ah Long use it to disseminate information about their services and phone numbers.

Sometimes, their advertisements will be plastered on the doors. The loan sharks proba-

bly want people to think of money wherever they are. Now, that is marketing taken to a whole new level.

All this may be vandalism, but it is a practice that is difficult to eradicate.

Janitors can't be expected to monitor the conduct of every person that enters the lavatory for fear of getting a tight slap on the face, or a trip to the police station. That's just as well. We can cherish it as something uniquely ours on World Toilet Day.

Indeed, if there is one thing permanent about our public toilets, it is the writing on the wall.