

BEHIND THE SCENES WITH THE PRESIDENT

November 10, 2010

Dear Friend,

A man, his underwear, and a flashlight. I can't tell you how many times I've heard stories that start this way. Growing up, I have also seen my father in this scenario a number of times. I once heard a version that included a man, his underwear and a mountain lion, wherein the man (in his underwear, of course) literally chased the mountain lion down the road in the middle of the night to get the cougar to drop his small dog. It worked, although I would never recommend such a thing.

My own story always starts the same way. Sometimes we actually hear something, sometimes we don't. Regardless, we wake up when our 90 pound Doberman barks while staring out our glass front door facing whatever it is that he saw or heard. I can usually tell when it is just the "wake up in the middle of the night and bark a warning bark or two" bark, and when it is a "there is a raccoon or bear outside" bark. If I can't tell, I'll wake up and retrieve one of the many cool flashlights I keep by my bed, pull back the covers and swing my feet out from under the warm blanket. My wife, mostly asleep, always mumbles, "What's wrong?" or "What is it?" I never answer, but she always asks. I head upstairs.

It's two weeks ago. It's 4am, and I am staring at a big bear. When I am standing in front of a mischievous bear, I always think the same thing, "I wish I would have bought my son that paintball gun he wanted." I search my mind for what I have on hand to scare a bear, but I never come up with anything. Instead, I stand and shine my expensive flashlight at it while my dog barks wildly 30 feet from the bear. It never moves.

I must look like a crazy person standing here in the dark shining a flashlight at a 400 lb. bear. Minutes go by. I look around; I guess to see if anyone is watching. I let out a woof. I heard at a dinner party that if you do that (woof at the bear), they will run off. Apparently I did not do it right; the bear is still there, looking at me. I let out another woof, just to double check...still nothing. I am still here, still shining the light, while the bear is still eating my trash and the dog is still barking. Standing outside at 4am, I begin thinking about my relationship to this bear...and to the world. Sometimes it's really hard to always do the right thing, don't you think? There are so many rules to follow these days; do this, don't do that. Use this word, not that one. My son told me I can't say a certain word anymore. Apparently they, whoever they are, (I guess in this case the dictionary people) literally took it out of the dictionary. I never checked.

Sometimes it's hard to keep up with all the latest rules, regulations, and expectations in life. The same is true for the environment. I know I should secure my trash cans. And for most of the summer, we did. In fact, I had just taken them out of the barn this week, but

clearly bears are not yet asleep, and now I have added to the problem of bears eating trash. I am not proud of that.

So what do I do? Tonight...nothing. I shut the barn door, which I had also left open, and go back to bed. Tomorrow I will do what you do in life when you've made a mistake. I will start over and try to do better. At the Zoo we have a saying; "We want you to live thoughtfully with the environment." If you boil it down, most of the time it is just that simple. As a conservation organization, we try to give you hints as to what that means in your life. It's things like putting your trash away every night. It all adds up, you know. It always seems that it must be more complicated, with more rules about life. But most of the time, it's not. If we actually did live more thoughtfully and were more mindful of those things we already knew were right and wrong, the world would be a better place.

But I will leave the rules for another night. As for now, my thumbs are tired from typing this letter on my Blackberry and my wife is yelling, "Bob! Come back to bed!" There is a saying that there is nothing new under the sun. I bet people all over the world have heard or said to their spouse, "Come back to bed." I think I will. After all, I will need my rest tonight in order to clean up the trash and move the trash cans to the garage tomorrow, and to continue my own search to live more thoughtfully with the world.

Warmly,

Bob Chastain