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Lessons We Learned From a Bunch of Skunks

By Harold & Bette Gillogly

Some years ago we lived in a remote mountain community in Southern California. There were lots of critters up there – some of them real pesky – and we had some hair-raising experiences with a few of them. But come to think of it, that’s better than tail-raising experiences, being that they were skunks. Yep, **skunks** – twenty three of them.

When we first became aware of our unwanted guests, we thought they were cats. They *sounded* like cats fighting in the crawl space beneath our house. It didn’t take long, however, to realize they sure didn’t *smell* like cats. An acrid aroma wafted up through our wood floors and heat vents – skunk! Unmistakably, skunk!

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By the middle of December, after trying mothballs, flood lights and trails of enticing food, we finally called County Animal Control and set up a trap for our aromatic friends. Within a few days, we had caught two big skunks (we’re talking *BIG*). We rejoiced. Our troubles were over. We boarded up their access hole and went to bed with a sigh of relief.

But our relief was short-lived. At 3:30 in the morning, we were awakened by Elicia and Dave, our daughter and son-in-law who were visiting us for the holidays, shouting down the stairs. “They’re in the house! They’re in the house!

Sure enough, as we gingerly stepped into the living room and turned on the light, a large ball of black and white fur waddled from behind the television to the Christmas tree and disappeared behind its branches. A heating vent gaped open a few feet from the tree with its top neatly set aside as though human hands had lifted it off and placed it just so. That explained how he had gotten *into* the house. But how were we going to get him *out*?

We tried the only solution we could think of – a trail of food from the Christmas tree out the open front door. We retreated to the warmth of our waterbed, leaving poor Dave bundled against the cold (it had to be around 20 degrees) to track the skunk’s maneuvers from the top of the stairs.

For over an hour, our fervent prayers for deliverance were repeatedly interrupted by Dave’s frantic whispers, “Shoo! Shoo!” When we finally ventured back out into the living room, we immediately discovered the reason for his desperate admonitions. There at the front door were two skunks eating their way *into our house* by way of the trail of food that was supposed to entice our visiting skunk *out of our house*.

One skunk in the house was better than three.

Our plan was a dismal failure. We shut the front door. One skunk was better than three. It was cold. We were tired. Enough was enough! It was

show-down time. It was either him or us! We began to cautiously investigate the premises, shining a beam of light under chairs, under tables, behind the Christmas tree, desperately hoping we would not encounter a vertical black and white tail. After a thorough search, we concluded our skunk must have found his way back down the heat vent, for he was nowhere in the house. Thank God!

Attempting to discourage any more skunk raids, we weighted each heat vent with a heavy log, (Let them try to lift *that!*), uncovered their access hole, and then went back to skunk trapping. When we caught number 14, we were informed by Animal Control that we held the skunk record of Riverside County, not only in number, but also in size (these were big bubbas). Now, there’s a dream come true – holding the skunk record of Riverside County.

But we were far from finished. Night after night, for a year and a half, we readied the skunk trap. Skunks can hibernate for weeks in between feedings, so we never knew if and when we would catch one. And nearly night after night, for a year and a half, the little critters would perfume our domicile. (We came to the conclusion they must have a little problem with odor-sack incontinence.)

For a year and a half, our clothes smelled like skunk; our hair smelled like skunk, our towels smelled like skunk, even Harold’s briefcase smelled like skunk. We got strange stares and sympathetic shrugs - from a distance!

Skunks (cont')

But we kept setting that trap. And finally, the skunks were gone – **all twenty-three of 'em!** We may not have exactly beat them, but we certainly out-lasted them. And that is the first lesson they taught us – **perseverance pays in the long run.** Do you know how many times we wanted to throw up our hands and walk away, leaving that house and everything in it to the skunks? But we would have lost too much had we given up, so we hung in there and kept doing what we knew we had to do.

We know couples who feel like giving up on their marriage. It's harder than they thought and takes longer than they want. They thought they were getting a great deal, found out they got a raw deal, and now want a new deal! Marriage relationships are not easy. None of us falls into a loving marriage, we have to get there the old fashioned way. We have to work hard at it. No, we don't work hard on our mates to make them into what **we want them to be.** We work hard on ourselves, allowing God to make us the mate **He wants us to be.**

Love is patient a long time

The very first description of love in 1 Corinthians 13 (verse 4) is *Love*

is patient. In the King James Version, the descriptive words used are "suffers long." Love is not just patient a few days or even a few years, **Love is patient a long time.** Love says, "I'm going to be patient with you as long as it takes for God to do what He wants in your life."

Persevere. Don't give up. Don't let the skunks take over!

Remember how we weighted down the heat vents with logs? That was such a nuisance, but it *was* good for a few laughs. Some friends visited us several months after the logs were strategically in place. Bob noticed the logs immediately (who wouldn't?). "Why do you have logs on your vents?" he asked innocently.

Without cracking a smile, Harold returned, "Haven't you heard? You can make your heating system 20% more efficient by keeping logs on your vents." Bob followed Harold into the living room, taking note of the logs on every vent in sight. He walked over to one and carefully studied it a few minutes. Finally, he asked, "Will any kind of wood work?"

Another skunk lesson: **don't believe everything you hear.** And we hear a lot nowadays, don't we – from pop-psychologists on down. It's the siren's song of

Self. Make sure you're getting everything you deserve; 'cause you deserve to be happy.

God, of course, says just the opposite. The world says *self.* God says *others.* The world says *take.* God says *give.* The world says *watch out for number 1.* God says *serve.*

Don't believe everything you hear.

We know couples who have fallen for the world's song of *Self.* Their attitude shouts, "Hey, you! You promised to love, honor and cherish me, so get with it!" But 1 Corinthians 13 (verse 5) says, *Love is not self-seeking.* Love does not seek what is best for self, but what is best for the beloved – not self-focused, but mate-focused. Love says, "I'm going to think of you before I think of me." Don't believe what the world tells you about *Self,* or you'll get skunked.

What a smart bunch of critters those skunks were! Remind us someday to tell you how tenacious they were, how they stuck together through good and bad (odors), how they didn't let obstacles stand in their way, how protective they were of each other. Yep, we sure learned a lot from those skunks!

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