



Cottage Memories

Chronicles of A City Boy's Life In The Country

TAKE NO PRISONERS

Spring's here along with the onset of bug season. Insects are the bane of my cottage existence. Or at least the wife's bane, which she gladly shares. I used to mostly ignore bugs: they don't take up much space, get sick or need petting; don't want to play or go for a walk, and don't incur vet bills. I've never stooped and scooped for an insect either. But the biting ones love humans, and that's where the wife and her bane changed my life, because she's prime meat. I mean, who else gets bug bites in December?

Her anti-insect antics are legendary. While she wraps up, rubs down, sprays around, swats about, runs away, douses, delouses and ducks inside, there's no peace to be had. Except the piece bugs have taken. But when she's gone, they'll settle for a piece of me. So she bought me a bug hat, which mats my hair, makes spitting sloppy, and is always like looking through dirty screen.

We've acquired more anti-bugging devices than the CIA has spooks. All are bigger than their pest targets; bug stuff for unwinnable psychological warfare. The psychology being that device manufacturers know about wives and insects. They know the endless bucks husbands will shell out to avoid being bugged. And they also know, that amid the trillions of pests in my air space, I'll feel better doing something - anything - to keep them away, however doomed that may be.

I'm suspicious that manufacturer genius, dollars and research hasn't yet produced a universal, fail-safe, insect eliminator. Why must I buy a different product for each kind of bug? Seems more like one for each bug. And why am I compelled to restock every spring because active ingredients have expired that didn't work anyways? I bet bear grease works better - assuming that there's a friendly bear handy. As reward for manufacturer collusion, I suspect insects maintain no-fly zones over their homes.

But never over mine. For house flies, so-called because they live inside, I buy swatters whose heads inevitably fall off into the salad under vigorous flailing. Or dangling sticky strips that catch me in the dark. Vapour blocks whose cloying pong turns my stomach. Or spray which permanently fogs windows.

Outside flies, I squish, inhale, swallow, or drown in my drink. At least black flies are easy to swallow, unlike horse flies, so designated because they would eat a pony if the wife wasn't around to chew on. Deer flies seem most prone to attack when I'm canoeing or

air mattressing, where missed swats inflict stinging slaps to bare flesh or result in unexpected immersion. I stay clear of wasps and hornets, but go after their nests using smoke, fire and projectile sprays, wearing my scuba gear for a quick lake dive when those stinging hordes defend their abodes. And don't get me started on those oh-so politically correct spongy moths, who will always be gypsies to me.

My summers reek of mosquito repellent. So do wife, dogs and wardrobe. It's pervasive, but hardly noticeable - like when everyone eats garlic - except to hapless passers-by who choke on a petrochemical whiff. Arrayed with coils, smudges, pots, bug lights and wall-to-wall ant traps, my cottage boasts decidedly eccentric décor.

As the ultimate repellent, I even tried not bathing. The wife said the stench certainly kept her away. While my dogs tried to roll in me, I began to attract flies. Meanwhile, my Purple Martins departed for purer air digs down the bay, leaving behind a ghost town of bird houses on poles.

So, I bought a large electric bug zapper which can't hold its own, but sounds great trying. Neighbours know by its continuous crackling that our siege is still underway. They can hear the zapper even louder on the rare occasions I move it outside.

But all is not lost. We built a screened in deck, attached to the cottage with military strength materials, where we live all summer, smugly secure observing bugs outside eating their little hearts out instead of ours. And when going for a walk, I don't have to send the wife outside first as a decoy anymore because of my special ballcap. The one with colourful, larger-than-life plastic dragon flies clipped to its brim. These decoys bob over my head on springy wires like guardian angels on pogo sticks.

The wife says I look like even more of a weirdo than usual, but at least I'm not a bitten one. I'm still trying to discourage real dragon flies from trying to mate with my fakes, but hey, without my hat, summer just ain't summer, ya know?

By Craig Nicholson

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