

Points East

By:
Ike Adams

Last Friday night, right at the edge of dark, at that time of day where you need your headlights on, but they still don't do very much good so it's difficult to see anything that might jump out in the road in front of you, something did, in fact, jump out in the road in front of me. Something black with a big white stripe down its back was under my right front tire before I could even touch the brake pedal.

If you've ever hit an animal on the road with your automobile, you know how sickening it feels. It's not something that most people do for fun unless it looks like a copperhead or rattlesnake and there are even some folks who feel badly about killing a snake. In spite of the hate mail it may get me, I'm not the kind of guy who grieves over dead serpents.

Nor am I prone to shed tears when I hit a possum. My wife hit one the other night and cried all the way home. She still can't talk about it without weeping. I wouldn't hit one on purpose, but I'd probably be more concerned with the mess on my car than really feeling much pity for the possum.

But it was not a snake or possum or somebody's family pet but, as far as I am concerned, utilized my truck in the act of committing suicide last Friday. And the sensation I experi-

enced had nothing to do with sympathy or regret for the animal. I felt sheer terror the instant I felt the whump of my wheel making contact. I had nailed a skunk and unlike most defenseless creatures that bite the dust on public roads, polecats tend to get even. Given a choice, I would need some time to make a decision on whether I would rather be sprayed by a skunk or snake-bitten on my rear end.

I've had both experiences and one is as bad as the other.

I spent my college summers in the late sixties working for the Boy Scouts of America as Camp Program Director and Troop Organizer at Camp Shawnee on Dewey Lake. The only perk to that job was unlimited use of a 1958, cherry red, step-side, Chevy pick-up that I kept spotless and polished with far more care than I give an automobile these days. Of course, I really don't have much interest in attracting girls these days either.

Anyway, the Scouts' professional executives were always wanting to borrow the truck in exchange for letting me use their cars. Their cars were generally station wagons with burn siding on them and no amount of Simazine and buffing was going to make them have any sex appeal. They were barely better than having no car

at all.

Then one summer Marvin Barber, the Council Executive, bought a brand new Mercury Montego MX. It was the first car that I had ever seen with a factory installed eighth track tape player and it had every other option available at the time. It was a deep maroon and had wire wheels. It reeked of class. Marvin not only guarded it like a hawk, he didn't even want any other passengers in it. When he drove it out to camp he would park it in the shade and put a canvas cover on it. But driving it out to camp meant two miles of dusty dirt road and the car needed frequent washing. I had to constantly remind him that this chore was not in my job description.

Finally one weekend he needed the truck and his car needed a good cleaning. We agreed that if I would give the car a good wash job, I could keep it instead of the Country Squire. I generally got stuck with it. I made a date with Dottie Harris, who agreed to go out with me only on the condition that I show up in that car, maintaining that she didn't go in a barn with anybody.

So I washed and waxed most of the day on a hot July Saturday and headed down Highway 23 between Prestonsburg and Paintsville with Steppenwolf's "Born to be Wild" cranking as loud as Marvin's system would allow without blowing out the windows. I had already picked up Dottie and she was sitting real close and we were headed to the drive-in movies. It was right at the edge of dark when the first skunk I'd ever seen in my life up close performed the exact same act described at the opening of this column.

The Mercury filled with the skunk spray almost as if a bomb had gone off inside it. It was instant. Dottie screamed and started vomiting all over the plush carpet and velvet seats. The odor was so strong you could see it.

Needless to say, that was my last date with Dottie Harris and I suspect she hates me with a passion to this day. It was also the last time I touched the Montego MX. The understatement of the century is that Marvin was upset and never understood that my first skunk encounter was unavoidable. He let the car set for weeks in a secluded spot at camp with incense burning in it and made numerous other futile attempts to rid it of the odor. I don't know that it ever stopped stinking, but he apparently got used to the smell.

After soaking them in tomato juice, then gasoline, then burying them for two weeks I finally wound up burning the nicest set of clothing I owned at the time. I slept in a tent for two weeks, and while the smell gradually went away, I'll bet the tent still stinks.

I was lucky that Friday though. For whatever reason, the skunk didn't have time to spray me. I know that I complain a lot about trash and filth along the road, but there is a dead skunk just over the hill on 21 for which I am responsible. There's also at least a dozen more besides it in the same condition between Paint Lick and Berea. And if you are one of the folks who hit the odors, please believe that I understand your hesitance to dispose of it more properly. Just try real hard to keep from hitting the buzzards that are currently feeding on them.

Sweet and Sour

By Zi Graves



The calendar hasn't said so yet, but all the signs are in the air. Spring is just around the corner. Of course there will be a few more days of snow flurries and days of using that precious fuel oil to supplement the new heat from the sun that is finally showing it's face.

Recently, the evidence of it was when a warm glow from the sun awakened the desire to "go pick a mess of wild greens." In turn, that took me back a few years and reminded me of my sister-in-law, Wilma, who was always the first person in the neighborhood to get a bucket of freshly picked wild greens from the fields close by. In mid February, she could be seen in a field or garden spot with her bucket under her arm, a knife ready for use in her hand, boots and sweater on for comfort, the days were still chilly, seeking out the tiny sprouts of dandelion, wild mustard, wild lettuce, violets and plantain, that when combined made one of the most tempting dishes one could find anywhere. After cooking them till they were tender they would be well drained then flavored with bacon drippings by dumping them in an iron skillet where bacon had just been fried and allowing them to stay long enough to allow the flavor to be absorbed. These accompanied by soup beans and fried potatoes was a treat for the whole family. So we folks from the hills of Kentucky are not the only people waiting for Spring to come so we can treat ourselves to nature's bounteous food supply if we only look for it. Wild greens in the spring, black berries in summer, persimmons when the first frost comes in the fall and snow cream when the first snowflakes come. What more could we ask for?

Wilma Hieny, was my very best girl friend when we were growing into young womanhood. (Kate, in my last article, was second best.) Wilma and I were from large families and had siblings to deal with. The difference was she was the oldest so had the responsibility to keep the younger ones in line. I was the middle child so I had to take orders from the older ones and take care of the little ones. Her mother worked at the pottery, her dad a machinist, so the care of the house was mostly in her hands. My mother did not work, but was called, "puny", so much of the work at our house was done by the kids so I was kept busy doing all the things needing to be done in a household with a sickly mom and younger children to be cared for. Wilma, two years my senior, and I share the same kind of problems so decided to act like sisters and share duties at each others house. Now that was fun. It wasn't nearly as hard for two to wash dishes for a gang as it was by ones self. It didn't matter which house we were working in she was always a welcome Buddy. A giggle here, helping hand there, and soon

the dishes would be on the shelf, the floor swept, kids corralled, and we would be free to talk, play outside with the kids, or go to the others house to see what was going on. Often it would be a game of hide and seek and we would join right in. Or perhaps take a walk down to the playground I told you about recently. We simply enjoyed being together.

That was quite different from these days when the T.V. takes over the education of our youth and teaches things we didn't know about till we were adults and married, or by talking to our best friends. And even those friends were slow and backward about talking about such things as sex and where babies came from. Were we ignorant, or lacked interest in what happened to us as we grew older? No, I don't think so, we had simply been taught differently. We had been taught our emotions and certain parts of our bodies were private and neither should be displayed in public or talked about. And the lack of knowledge of such things did not interfere with our growing up into responsible men and women.

This special friendship with Wilma had results I wasn't expecting or very happy about for awhile. My older brother, George, six years my senior, four years older than Wilma, was a handsome young man with a mop of black hair and blue eyes that attracted the young women at church we attended. He sang bass in the choir, tenor or lead in the specials, and substituted for the choir director. He was single and available. A good catch? Well, maybe so, but he was my big brother and I wasn't ready to give him up to anyone. Wilma, I found out thought otherwise. I thought she was too young to be interested in boys, but she fooled me, and betrayed my trust in her friendship. When she up and married my big brother.

I will never forget the night they arrived at our house, she with a beautiful red rose in her hand, and announced they had just got married. No big fancy wedding, a justice of the peace had performed the wedding. My world crumbled, my best friend was no longer there and she had taken by brother with her. I dropped what I had in my hands and made a hasty retreat to my room where I fell on my bed in a fit of anger and tears. That didn't last long though, for the two dearest people in my life at that time, was sitting down stairs happily holding hands and making plans for the future. Then the thought came to me, well, you two have often talked of how nice it would be to be, well, sisters, so now we really are. Down stairs was reached quicker than the upstairs room had been a few minutes before and she was welcomed with open arms to being my real sister now. And she was till her death a few years ago. That rose was their symbol of love. His gift to her when she said yes to his proposal was not a diamond ring, it was a red rose.

Their wedding bouquet was "A Red Rose."

Their marriage didn't last for their lifetime, but Wilma's relationship with the family did. After they had been blessed with seven beautiful and talented children and had weathered the Great Depression, bruised but not fatally injured, they decided the effort of dealing with their problems was more than they thought they could handle and quit trying. A few years later George remarried. Wilma never did, she told me once, "I loved one man, that is enough." And even after nine pregnancies, (two dead) she was still pretty, charming, and talented enough to have attracted many men.

would like them. The kitchen in our

The trials in their life had been many, but much of it was due to having too many babies to close together. The great depression was in full force and jobs were scarce, frustrations and tempers high. All cause enough to account for many of their problems of people trying to raise a family.

They had often ended up at our place which was already crowded, but we made room for them and had never said a word about too many mouths to feed. And we really did love those beautiful babies.

Now I have already spoken of Wilma's cooking skills and now they came in handy. She made the best rolls, big brown loaves of golden bread and yeast doughnuts I have ever tasted. Good enough till they didn't last long at our house, so she decided to see how the public

house in Cincinnati, became a bakery shop. George had also developed the skills of baking so they both sat up late at night to put bread and doughnut dough to raise so it was ready for baking early the next morning. The delicious smell of fresh baked bread woke us every morning and soon the door would be opened and George would disappear with a big basket of their nights work securely held in anxious hands, to knock on doors of the more fortunate people with jobs, to find new customers or deliver hot rolls, doughnuts or bread for the morning customers. It worked for awhile and they paid their way. The Great Depression took its toll on many people, but most of us survived it in one way or another. My dad was one of those blessed with a steady job through it all and never complained of the added burdens placed on him when one of his children needed help.

Years later things changed. George became crippled with a lung disease to TB and crippling arthritis. Ruth worked to help support herself and the children, (by a former marriage) and life went on.

Wilma used her skill of cooking to support herself. Her family grown and on their own freed her from the responsibility of caring for little kids so at last she was free to live and enjoy her life as she pleased. All of them in one way or another ended their lives in California. George's second wife, Ruth and Wilma, became close friends and each took turns caring for him in his final days in the nursing home. Even though they were many ups and downs in his religious life he never forgot the time as a young man he had accepted JESUS as his Savior, in the Evangelical Church, and his desire to spread the word. So while he was in the hospital he administered to the spiritual needs of other patients and was the cause of many changing their lives.

When he died his body was returned to Cincinnati to be buried next to Mom and Dad and was accompanied by Ruth. Where was Wilma? We all felt her place was there. But when I asked her that night by phone, with a choking sound in her throat her answer was, "No Zi, that is not my place now, that place belongs to Ruth. I said my final goodbye here. But he will always be in my heart."

I noticed a beautiful fresh red rose on his chest the day of the funeral and commented on it. I should have known the answer, Wilma. She had instructed her children to be sure a fresh one was there for every viewing.

It doesn't quite end there. When Wilma passed away several years later, a fresh Red Rose was on her breast. Her children remembered the love story.

Sometimes I forget what love is, then when I write of someone like Wilma, it all comes back and my heart seems to overflow with it.

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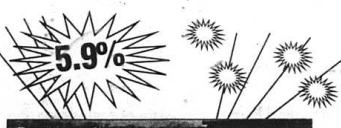
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