

A Bird In The Flue Makes For A Zoo

By T. L. Gray

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It was a cool fall evening as the vonNostitz family sat around the fireplace gossiping about family members and commenting on ingenious commercials—mainly wondering what kind of twisted minds came up with such stuff as talking swamp lizards staking out a beer shack. Your normal family evening, in other words. By the hearth lay Lady, a pure white mixed breed of pit-bull and bulldog, snoring. Little did I know this lazy, peaceful evening was about to become an adventure I'm not likely to forget anytime soon.

A rustling sound near the fireplace moments later brought her to immediate attention. At first, we ignored it, but the clattering continued inside the flue until Lady, side by side with Mom, both felt the need to investigate further. There they stood, with hind-ends stuck out and heads buried between the opened mesh netting serving as a screen. A debate ensued over whether the intruder was feathered or furred—most voted for the squirrel because sounded like toe nails clicking against the tin sides. It was a matter of opinion as to whether Lady or Mom had the better view.

Mom had a plan, of course. One that insured removal of the animal with little fuss and less likelihood of injury. It sounded like a good plan at the time, and who was I to say it wouldn't work? At least she had one. The plan--I would hold a grocery sack beneath the opening, ready to catch the little bugger when Mom opened the flue. The animal would fall into the sack. Then she would take it outside and release it. Simple, right? Except Lady, who weighed in at a good hundred pounds, most of it sitting on her massive head, made it clear she intended on supervising every move. She shouldered her way between the Mom and myself, trembling with excitement, barking, and slinging more than a little slobber, while everyone else snickered at the picture we made.

"Okay," Mom said, handing me the bag. "On the count of three I'll open the flue and you be ready to catch him."

"Right," I said, taking position.

"One, two. . .three!"

And all hell broke loose. Stunned by the flurry of wings, and knocked off balance by the lunging Lady--whose reflexes are apparently better than mine--I fell backward, minus my quarry. Mom let out a screech that would have rivaled a band of attacking Zulu, snatched the empty bag from my hand, and the race was on.

Everyone scattered, running into each other, covering their heads so as not get their eyes poked out or their hair entangled during the bird's mad flight around the room. Lady, already in hot pursuit, bumped into and knocked over chairs, people, basically anything that had the bad sense to get in her way. Have you ever tried to outmaneuver one hundred pounds of scrambling, muscle-bound, this-one-is-mine-get-the-hell-outta-the-way canine with blood in its eye? Neither had my Mother, who was frantically swiping at the housebound bird in hopes of catching it before Lady did.

Recovering from my trampling by Attila-the-bird-hunter, I joined the parade of hunters who were now rumbling through the kitchen, into the front hall, where my Mother gave me the unpleasant job of tackling and holding Lady. As if such a thing could be done. Meanwhile, the rest of the family could be heard howling like a pack of hyenas, all the while critiquing our rescue plan. Like they could have done better?

More crashing and banging ensued in the narrow hallway while I wrestled The Great White. The dog was clearly winning.

I yelled at my Mother, “Hurry up and catch that maniac bird! Good God, this dog’s breath could curl cheese.”

“I’m trying, but he’s too quick!”

And just when I thought we had a shot at victory. . . Mom started laughing. Knowing this would last for a good five minutes, during which she would be rendered incapable of all physical and mental activity—it’s a trait that runs on her side of the family—I dug my heels in and earned myself a place on the tiled floor, tangled up with Lady. Our intimate position sent my mother into another peal of laughter.

“It’s not funny, Mom.”

“Sorry, honey.”

“Stop breathing on me!”

The only thing left to do was now pray, because it was apparent none of the rest of the family had any ideas about coming to help. God must have been taking a coffee break at the time and heard my plea. More likely, He just felt sorry for the bird, which was bound to have brain damage by now from all the wall banging.

Finally, my mother managed to pull herself together and concentrate once again on the task at hand. By this time the poor feathered soul we so valiantly started out to rescue became exhausted, and Mom was able to catch it in the bag as it plummeted toward the floor. And just in time, too, for Lady broke the tenuous choke hold I had on her and scrambled to her feet, trampling over the top of me without a second thought to follow Mom and her interesting bag to the back door.

The moral of this story? Well, there are three. Humor can whisk into your life without a moment’s notice. Enjoy it. Savor it. Because it will become the stuff memories are made of. Never wrestle a dog bigger than you. You’ll lose. And, last but not least, always have a back-up plan. You never know when one of God’s little creatures might come whizzing down your flue.