

ABOUT TRAP-LINES AND A NEIGHBOR'S DILEMMA

Second Thoughts

By J. B. Leftwich, Columnist

Walter Goodall, my up-the-street neighbor, intercepted my daily walk last week to ask an important question. What to do about a skunk?

I modestly acknowledge a wee bit of knowledge about skunks, both the two-legged species and the four-legged variety. Indeed, I have had intimate contact in days gone by with a few skunks who left lasting imprints on me.

“You caught a skunk!” Mama announced in a form of a statement rather than a question. I had run my trapline and returned with a prize trophy which I had skinned and then stretched the pelt over an arrow-shaped board designed for the purpose.

At about age 14 I had rounded up Granddaddy's old steel traps, cleaned and filed them, and carefully set them in dens throughout a few of our 167 acres. Occasionally, I landed a catch which would yield \$1 at one of the general stores in the village. Black skunks were more valuable than striped ones, and the one I landed that drizzly morning Mama confronted me was almost solid black and good for the highest price.

Strangely, drizzly night were great for skunks. On many misty nights, I would summon Old Thunder, and my brother and I would go polecat hunting. Although wary of a skunk's armory, Thunder never backed away. He would circle and dodge his prey, but ultimately he would do battle and to heck with the consequences.

Well, the upshot of Mama's dictum that misty morning was a burial. I buried my clothes so that the good earth would reduce the odor. No amount of washing and scrubbing took away the aroma. To eradicate the smell, you had to bury your clothes. You could go to school in freshly washed overalls, back up to the stove, and immediately drive all the girls in the on-room center of education away from the fire. And away from you for the rest of the day. Heat brought out the pungency of the odor.

Dixie, the Airedale who owns my son Jack and his family, is much like Ole Thunder. She apparently does not back away. Then she wonders why we are not as affectionate with her as usual.

I seem to have an enduring relation with polecats. Last week, one paid us a visit.

“Is that skunk I smell?” I asked Her.

“Peuuuw!” She said, or words to that effect.

Sure enough, when we opened the outside door a pungent aroma greeted us.

I remember a camping vacation at Willow Grove on Dale Hollow Lake. She was reading a book while sitting on a folding chair with her legs propped on a bench. Intuitively, she looked down and saw a mother skunk followed by a litter of four kittens marching slowly under her legs. Wise to the way of skunks, She remained still until the family marched a goodly distance away.

I read recently about a man who cut a pet door in his house so that the family cat could egress and ingress at will. One night, he idly was scratching his cat's head as he read his newspaper. For some reason, he glanced down. You're ahead of me, it was not his cat.

Times have changed since I ran my trap-line. Steel traps now are regarded as cruel and unusual treatment. Although I thought little about this aspect when pursuing trapping as a gainful sideline, I agree now. If I resume trapping, I intend to use only deadfall traps. These you make yourself by whittling three elements including a long triggering device which you bait. Then you carefully balance a large flat rock on the three pieces arranged in a triangular pattern. When the rock falls, the animal is killed.

Which brings us back to neighbor Walter Goodall who reported a skunk had dug a den under the outside unit of his heating-cooling system. The problem: How to extract the skunk without sending polecat perfume coursing through the ducts and out of the vents into his house.

I dunno. Any suggestions?

Maybe a deadfall trap?

(J.B. Leftwich is a veteran journalist and a columnist for *The Lebanon Democrat*.
Email: leftwichjb@charter.net)

<http://www.ajlambert.com>