

## Rascally raccoons: the saga continues

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They're BAAAACK! I've known for some time that raccoons have been making nocturnal visits to our bird feeders (it's impossible to ignore the nightly gifts they leave for me to surreptitiously sweep off the deck), but I didn't want to tell husband Ray who has been threatening to shoot them when they returned.

Not to worry. In the wee hours of a recent rainy morning, I woke to the beeping of the security alarm when Ray—I know it's hard to believe—actually turned it OFF before opening a door to the deck. He flipped on the perimeter lights and the yard lit up as if we were in the midst of a full-scale prison break (no siren, though).

Having earlier told Ray that Sally, my friend Jean's sister who lives in California, shoots troublesome raccoons off her roof with a garden hose, I hoped to hear the sound of running water. But I quickly jammed the pillow over my head when I saw that Ray was armed with the .22 rifle he received as a Christmas present when he was 14. If I couldn't save the raccoons, at least I didn't have to listen to the shots that dispatched them.

Within two minutes, Ray was crawling back in bed, fizzing with laughter. "I fully intended to shoot them," he confessed, "but they were so wet and bedraggled looking! The larger one immediately hauled tail; the little one walked toward me until he was about six inches away from the gun barrel, sat back on his haunches, gave me a pitiful look and held up his right paw in surrender. All I could do was laugh."

I should have known that the only raccoon Ray could shoot would be the one that fired on him first!

He didn't even shoot at a raccoon on a long-ago winter night when my father persuaded him to participate in a coon hunt. Ray, whose boots crashed through the ice into the Wakarusa River as he and the other men followed the dogs pursuing the coon, came home wet and bedraggled himself. Snorting with disgust—hard to do when his teeth were chattering with cold—Ray described the hunt in less than glowing terms: "The good news is that the coon got away. He was the only sane creature out and about tonight since his only reason for being out in such lousy weather was because the dogs were chasing him!"

It was Ray's first and last coon hunt. As for Dad, as soon as he had enough material for a magazine article, he, too, gave up coon hunting.

Lately, Ray has had a much bigger problem to worry about than raccoons. The deer that we were so thrilled to see grazing in our yard developed a voracious appetite for tulips and phlox. After the deer ate the tops off 60 tulips and left the bulbs on top of the ground, Ray purchased a pricey cayenne pepper spray, advertised to deter deer and other critters from plants they shouldn't be eating. Unfortunately, we don't know if the spray

works or not because, immediately after application, the sky opened and a Noah-sized rain washed it all off.

The next day, Ray was grousing to our friend Martha about the destructiveness of the deer, telling her he supposed he'd have to buy more expensive spray. "What you need to buy," said our usually-compassionate friend, "is a .30-.30!"

However, I am not in the least concerned for the safety of the deer. Ray has long proclaimed that he could never shoot deer because of their soulful brown eyes. I suspect that even a full-grown buck, caught red-hoofed with a tulip dangling from his mouth, would be safe from being shot by anything other than a garden hose or video camera!

While I won't attempt to name the deer (too many to keep track of), I am considering naming the raccoons now that I know they'll be with us for a while. And I'll need a lot of names because the other night when I heard a noise on the deck, I turned on the lights and discovered five tiny raccoons clinging to the same bird feeder.

Ty Coon is a good name for one, I think, and perhaps another can be dubbed Bandit. How about Ringo for a ring-tailed critter? Zorro might be appropriate or The Lone Ranger. Oh, yes! I'll definitely call one The Lone Ranger! ("Who is that masked critter?" . . . "Heigh-ho Silver-tail! Away!")