

Mr. Fly

Quite upset, I stood on the back porch, raised the shotgun and put the critter in my sights. There he sat in the garden, eating the fruits of my labor. In a Late Night Movie gangster voice I croaked, "OK, Mr. Woodchuck, here comes your ticket to *eternity!*" But before I could pull the trigger, a memory came to me.

My son once uttered a similar line to his nemesis. Bothered by one of those big "bottle" flies in his bedroom, the kind that always amaze us when they come to life in the middle of winter, my then 16 year old boy chased the annoying thing all over the upstairs one afternoon. Furniture got toppled over in the *mêlée* and the entire battle campaign left quite a mess. Coincidentally, so he later explained when I forcefully debriefed him, most of the combat and the damage took place in his sister's room.

"Couldn't be helped, Dad," he said. "I guess Mr. Fly was attracted to all those bottles of girlie goo and *feminine* crap."

Soon after, my wife spotted a giant plastic fly swatter in a variety store and brought it home to Dave Jr. as a humorous present. She thought it was funny, I wasn't so sure. After all, a 3 foot long swatter, with the business end as large as a waffle iron, is really a deadly weapon. We'd armed the kid for Armageddon.

You can guess the end of this story, but I'll tell it anyway. The next time the sun played across his bedroom window and the insect came out to play, Dave took off after that fly with murder in his heart

He slammed the door to his room to corner the little varmint. No escape down the hall, not this time. On his desk near the window, Dave pointed his goose neck lamp upward so that Mr. Fly might be attracted to the heat and light. It worked. Pretty soon the Calliphora Vomitoria buzzed around the lamp and the boy crept up for the final blow. He choreographed the attack, as he told me later, so his swing would bring the miscreant down on the desk where it would be crushed by the giant swatter. In a mock accent like The Terminator, he whispered "'Hasta la Vista, Baby!'"

But bottle flies are pretty smart, or at least pretty fast. A heartbeat away from oblivion, the little bastard

(Junior's words) shot straight up in front of the window. Sixteen year olds are also pretty fast, if not so smart at times. Caught now in a stance as if he was about to behead the Queen of England, Junior quickly changed his stance into a "Batter Up!" position just like Mickey Mantle at spring training. He swung out at the fly like he was hitting a ball out of the park.

Mr. Fly survived. The window didn't do too badly. Halfway through the swing, the swatter caught the desk lamp and brought it along for the ride. But before it could crash into the window, the light left the swatter and flew across the room, wire dangling along wildly behind it. The cast iron base smashed squarely into the face of the television set. You've probably been told not to worry about damaging a television tube, because they're so strongly built. Not true. This one imploded, at first sucking in all the glass particles, and a split second later spitting them back out all over the room. Sort of instant justice: no more television for you!

I felt bad for the kid. Armed by his own mother, he had now lost the TV his uncle gave him (without our permission, by the way.) I told the boy I expected him to learn a valuable lesson from this about anger, dealing with frustration, advance planning. something like that or some of the above.

"Anyway," I said, "you missed."

Grabbing me in a headlock, Junior knuckled the remaining hair on my head. In his best Terminator voice he snarled, "I'll be **Bach!**!",

So, that morning on the back porch, I put the rifle down and reconsidered Mr. Woodchuck's death sentence. I gave him the benefit of the doubt and over the next few weeks watched him munch up my garden. The next year, I sowed extra beans for him and even set out his own cucumber plant. We've mostly co-existed ever since, except for the time he ate up half of my yellow beans. Attempting to evict him from under the barn with clouds of noxious fumes from an insect fogger, I instead only stunk up the place for the rest of the summer. When I work in the garden, I know he's nearby listening and I tell him, "Just don't push it or it's Hasta la Vista, Baby!'" I can hear him laughing.

David Griffin

Copyright 2008

The Windswept Press
Saugerties, NY

www.windsweptpress.com