

Poems
"Wasps, Bugs, Bees, and Snakes" "A First Rate Soup" and "Parable"

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[Wasps, Bugs, Bees, and Snakes](#)

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Wasps, Bugs, Bees, and Snakes

It takes only once to remember forever the sting of a wasp
And so the time I cannot forget
When I stood naked and pulled on my swim trunks
And there in the mesh lining buzzed a wasp unbeknownst to me
Until I hoisted him up
The shock of the sting on my soft inner thigh
Followed by such Buster Keaton adrenaline . . .
In the public camp ground no less . . .

* * *

There are so many wasps at the farm—inside and out, nesting under eaves and rafters, finding their way into my living space, perched on my tables and chairs, my bedding . . . Ah . . . the despair of that first summer . . . what had I gotten myself into?

Vigilance and carnage my response to despair.

The three main types: the mud daubers, the paper nesters, the ground dwellers.

I made peace with the mud daubers, and, except for the yellow jackets, I have no quarrel with the ground dwellers. Of the paper nesters there are two types:

The brown yellow type has an extremely long neck and asymmetrical body.

At first this tiny dragon terrified me, but after an afternoon repairing fascia board on the second floor roof, a job I had put off many times before just to avoid a confrontation, I came to an understanding with the brown and yellow variety.

They bumped into me several times, merely clumsy and surprised that I had sprung up in their air space. They did not sting.

As for the other paper wasp—the ubiquitous one, stealthy and sinister, the one everyone has seen, the curious one, the one who will inspect your laundry and who will defend its multi-cellular nest—as for him, we have yet to find common ground. I am embarrassed that my instinctive panic and flight response stand in the way of reconciliation.

I try deep breathing, praying to the Buddha, nothing seems to work.

I have hope, nonetheless, for a calm meeting across the great divide of our species.

After the wasps, are mosquitoes and ticks, annoying but manageable.

But then there's the flies—flocks of flies riding out the wind on the calm side of my house, flies by the dozens on the interior windows, flies in piles on the floor after a week away. So far this spring their numbers are less, the house less drafty, less porous.

Then the snakes. . . snakes in the garage, in the bathtub, on the porch—the most bold and most friendly is the eastern yellowbellied racer who this spring curled and coiled in a wild display of welcome and did not object to being moved to the elm stump. A fine looking serpent with a nicely shaped head and a gentle disposition.

The Black rat snakes roam the soffets, slither through the rafters and the attic, falling through ceiling tiles leaving their sheddings in the utility room and their dung in slim green extrusions.

The carpenter bees, *xylocopa virginica*, whose boldness and assertion know no limits, whose territorial expansion knows no bounds; gave no quarter and got none in return.

The males nearly the size of a humming bird guard the entrance to the nest and challenge any creature who comes within ten feet.

Too fast to swat or to spray from an aerosol can, they dive with superior speed and come within inches of your face.

They chew into untreated lumber boring a hole about ½ inch in diameter, which they improve to create a series of tunnels where they deposit their eggs.

As Johnnie Cochran might say:

"You must find the nest if you wish to eliminate the pest"

so . . .

Look for sawdust.

Spray desiccant into hole.

Wait two days.

Seal with caulk

Tom Weis 6-10-10

Parable

I was in the garage. I just hitched the trailer to the tractor, not a real tractor, a big riding mower, 16 horse Briggs and Stratton, double blade belly mower with a hitch for my trailer, not a real trailer, either, a cheap metal box with wheels, 10 cubic feet and a tailgate that slides into metal slots—cheap, but still better than anything else I had at the moment, since I wasn't a real farmer, just weekends, taking baby steps.

It's cold. I heat with wood, and it's been cold for awhile now, so most of my wood is gone—enough for two more nights is all I have.

So I'm hitching up my cheap trailer to the tractor (not a tractor) when the dog (a real dog), his name is Stinger,

So Stinger gets up and starts walking toward the front.

It's something then.

I step out and as I round the corner, it's two men in an older Buick Century, maroon, dirty from eight miles of gravel road they had to drive to get here. They're walking up the path, a guy in a tan suit leading an older fellow. The old guy was small, frail looking wearing a Carhart (brown) jacket, ball cap with ear flaps, carrying a book, (a bible it turns out).

We meet at the porch. The tan suit guy is underdressed as the wind whips up the valley. Lows in the teens since Christmas and now almost February. He asks me who I might be.

I say Tom—which breaks his rhythm, since he's expecting "Tom Jones" or "Tom Smith originally from St. Joe" or something. But I only give him "Tom," wanting to cut this short.

So he replies in kind, and says he's Robert or Delbert or something. A nice looking man, clean shaven, even features, late 30's. As he spoke, he was all sincerity, upbeat, holding a pamphlet in his hand. Turns out it's a copy of AWAKE, official publication of the Jehovah's Witness.

He introduces the old guy. We shake hands all around.

We talk firewood and then how we are working too hard. And Delbert hands me the tract. It says AWAKE on the cover and then I read a smaller title: "Are You working too Hard?"

"Yes I am," I say to myself" and then remember to apologize to Delbert and the old guy for not inviting them in, since I am "just this minute all set to collect some firewood."

"I'm kind of under the gun here," I said, (I wasn't) " . . . or I would ask you to come in"

And the look from Delbert of the tanned suit; a sinking look, a look of such profound pity and disappointment . . . as if to say (and I'm interpreting here) "I am hurt, deeply hurt, not for me but for you, for you not taking the time to receive the Lord and His many blessings . . . as you slide down the slippery slope to hell when we've come to help you in spite of your unregenerate ways."

Such pity, such emotional pain, all for poor miserable me. . . but I know such looks.

I know exactly what they mean.

O.K., I say to myself: What a great pitch. Bring the senior citizen or any of the feeble-minded, the friendless, the lonesome who populate your church—especially the old who seek comfort in their salvation, blessed by your reassurance . . . which is your main job and sincerity your main talent.

And in gratitude, your flock gives money, funds endowments, building projects, new pews, charitable works, even the gas for your car which you use to travel 278 Road all the way to 56 Highway and into Muscotah. . .

And driving all the while keeping an eye out for the weak, the old, the lost, gathering them in so they can feel part of something. Doing the Lord's work.
You make them feel good about themselves, and on balance, I have no problem with you, no more than I do the five dollar slot machines at the Indian Casino.
But your sincerity is wearing thin and I want to go since you have come unannounced and since I am in no mood for religious disputation.
But first the old guy must read me a verse from the good book, not one I have ever heard before . . . there's no context, no moral, no life lesson –just a long drone of Elizabethan English. Pointless.
. . . and it's cold and windy.
Then more sincerity and well wishing, and I'm doing it, too, now . . .
I pitch my voice full of self deprecation and humility, unworthy to breathe God's good clean air, full of sorry that I have to get to it, low on wood and all.
Then we're "God blessing" and "goodbyeing. . ." such sweet sorrow in departure.
Now, we're moving apart, waving, (it takes forever to say goodbye) and then I holler for the dog who follows Delbert and Mr. Carhart senior citizen to their maroon car. Stinger likes to ride and won't come when I call him.
I holler, "That dog will jump in your car—watch when you open the door," but I'm not sure they hear me, since Stinger is frisking around, being a worry, the path to their car snow packed and icy.
And I go back to my tractor and head to the pasture to gather the wood I had cut into logs the day before.
As I clear the corner, the maroon Buick is backing slowly down the driveway. The dog, who's never been good around cars, wants to lead, wants in, wants to play, and of course all would be for nothing if Delbert ran him over. What kind of messenger of the Lord would kill a man's dog?
I can't help but smile, even though I know it's wrong to make light of other people's trials.
But wait. This story is not over, for let me say unto you now, all ye non-believers:
"Thou shalt not mock the Lord thy God nor his earthly helpers, for verily I say to you there will be great gnashing of teeth and pulling of hair and other such righteous payback, so sayeth the Lord" as revealed to his humble servant.
And so it was one mishap after another as I tried to load firewood and haul it to the house. The tractor with wheels spinning and sliding:
The trailer, overloaded, back tilted, the wood sliding . . .
buckling the tailgate
firewood tumbles down the hill.
A forty-five minute job taking nearly three hours. No choice but to carry the wood by hand to the top of the hill.
I drop a log on my toe. There's a cross chain-sawed on the log, perfect in its proportions, but less clear in its meaning.
I decided to call it a day. Spent the afternoon looking for signs, and then made burnt offerings to the four directions. Been thinking about putting up a gate, but haven't decided yet.

Tom Weis 6-9-10

A First Rate Soup

In a film about Abraham Maslow
And his hierarchy of needs
... a late sixties affair
plunky, filmstrip music,
a lovely thin blonde woman
staring at sunsets
transcendentally thorough in all things
absorbed in the mundane,
workaday doings of life
and she, never speaking, glowing to the dopey music,
the shining beacon of self-actualization in action

then cut to the substance
and there sits the venerable humanist, himself,
all aglow in suit and tie, beaming,
secure atop the pyramid of perfected self-hood
and he says:
"better a first rate soup than a second rate poem"
. . . and years later, years after Ed Psych,
years in which lowly me struggled to climb a rung,
rationalizing not having a significant other,
pulling myself inch by inch into and then out of basic needs
and never writing anything but second rate poems
And too impatient or bungling or bored to make a first rate soup
I must ask Dr. Maslow:
"Is there no hope?"
"Should I give up poetry and concentrate on soup?"
and
"How in the name of God—that is, my personal conception of universal order and purpose—
do I lift myself up?
Not saying the apex, self actualized, serene, content,
but only the next level . . .
I am stuck . . .
And when I meditate on my failings as a poet
as a maker of fine soup
All I see are pyramids and ladder rungs
And smiling Buddhas in business suits