

## A Gordon Kirkland At Large Column Reprint



### Does A Columnist Poop In The Woods? ...Almost

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When I was a child there was a radio program that came on during the lunch hour featuring stories and songs for young children. The theme music for the show was The Teddy Bears' Picnic.

"If you go out in the woods today, you're sure of a big surprise..."

I went out in the woods the other day, and yes, I got a big surprise; one I hope that won't be repeated anytime soon. Frankly, I blame my doctor and his "get more exercise" mantra for the surprise ending to my sojourn into the forest.

I've often heard about a trail in the mountains north of my place that is groomed to make it accessible for the disabled. I happened to be driving past it recently, on a day that I had some time to kill. Hearing my doctor's words, I decided to give it a try. I grabbed my camera, and put Tara, my assistance dog, into her harness. Together we set out from the parking lot, and were soon totally secluded from the sounds of the highway.

The walk was pleasant. The trail was better than I expected it to be. The forest was filled with new spring growth. Birds were singing, and all along the way I could hear the sound of a river rushing toward a waterfall. When we reached the end of the trail, we discovered that there was a large observation platform looking out over the waterfall as it dropped a couple of hundred feet into a small canyon.

When Tara and I started back toward the car we were walking into the wind. It was cool, but not unpleasant. We took our time, partially because I was enjoying the scenery, and partially because Tara had to sniff every tree, rock, and blade of grass just in case some other dog might have left her a pee-mail message.

Three quarters of the way back to the car I heard a rustling in the brush. The source of that sound gave everyone involved 'a big surprise.' Because of the wind direction, Tara didn't expect what we saw, I was certainly unprepared for what we saw, and I am pretty sure the very large black bear that stepped out of the woods and onto the trail about twenty-five feet ahead of us was completely unprepared to see us.

This was most assuredly not one of the friendly teddy bears that was the subject of the song from so many years ago. It didn't look like the sort of animal that would sit around in a group eating finger sandwiches.

Fingers maybe, but only if it has room after eating your other body parts.

Part of Tara's training involves stepping between me and anything that she considers dangerous. In the past

that has been largely limited to other dogs, the occasional coyote, and a couple of very startled Jehovah Witnesses. True to her duty, she planted herself between the bear and me, but I don't think she was all that crazy about the idea. Her tail, which is normally wagging, was tucked so far between her legs that she probably could have tickled her own chin with its tip.

The bear looked at us and grunted loudly. I waved one of my crutches in the air and shouted. I don't think I frightened the bear, but now that I think of how I must have looked, it probably thought I was nuts. Either way, it decided that it didn't want to have anything to do with me, despite nuts being a big part of a bear's diet. It slowly sauntered back into the forest.

Knowing that people might not believe me, I quickly took a couple of pictures. The bear turned when the shutter clicked and grunted again. I got the message it was trying to convey – "No pictures."

I was right about needing photographic evidence. When I told the story to a friend, he gave me an incredulous look. It was just as I suspected. He was having difficulty believing that I'd actually go out and willingly do something to get some exercise.

I hardly believe it myself.

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"No pictures"