

Dog Days of Autumn

By Andrew Pezzulo

It was the fall of the year, a cool crisp Saturday morning, and I was on the campaign trail. Through the arboreal tunnels down the back roads of Guilford I traversed in my little red Volkswagen. The trees were just starting to turn their autumn colors, just tinged with red and gold which contrasted wonderfully with patches of blue sky visible through the leafy canopy. On such a day, door to door campaigning could easily be a pleasant experience. Supplied with a list of voters, a map and my campaign literature I pulled my car into the driveway of my first stop.

Obadiah was already out on her front stoop accompanied by her little white poodle even before I turned off the engine. I assumed it was Obadiah because my list indicated such. Last name must have been Cutting, living on Cutting Road in an area called Cuttingsville. Campaigning just wasn't so difficult at all. I surmised by her age and bearing that she could be the matriarch of an entire clan. I resolved to make an impression.

As I got out of the car and approached her, her little white poodle wandered away into the front yard. Ubiquitous is the word which most precisely describes the presence of dogs on the southern border of Vermont. A veritable canine corps of huge proportion defends that border from intrusion by those living to the south who might through sheer jealousy of Vermonters try to bring mayhem to a quiet and peaceful region. Obviously recognized as a stalwart and upright member of the community by this legion of dogs I surmised I was given a pass to travel freely through the area and up to this time I had no trouble with any of these four legged sentinels.

As I spoke to Obadiah of my plans, my hopes and my dreams for her town and the state of Vermont we both kept our eyes on the little poodle. For several minutes, as I delivered my speech, we watched as the poodle crisscrossed the mowed lawn, sniffed and pawed and sniffed again obviously looking for a place to do its duty. Finally the poodle approached the front driver's side tire of my vehicle, right in front of us, lifted its leg and soaked a portion of that front tire. Now I could not help thinking as I witnessed this event whether there was any correlation between the dog's actions just then and the thoughts of this potential voter concerning all that I had just said.

Undaunted, I wrapped up my speech, handed her my campaign literature, jumped into my car and headed down the road to the next house some distance away. Here I was met by a bigger but rather

friendly dog. By the time I had knocked on the door, ascertained no one was home, and hung a campaign card on the doorknob, this dog had made a contribution to my left front tire just as the poodle had done. So it went for several more houses. Whether the owner was home or not the resident canine added to the increasingly wet front tire of my car. "It must be a means of communication.", I thought. Little did I know.

It was a typical rural driveway, very similar to all the rest I had driven down on my campaign. It entered at the corner of the lot, went along the tree line for a bit before turning toward a house set into the shady side of a treeless low round ridge. There was an ample parking area set before a basement entrance of a ranch style house. I rolled into this area just as the disc of the sun peeked over the ridge. A car was parked here so I had high hopes of speaking to a human resident of the house.

Even though now I question the judgment of knocking on a basement door with the expectation that someone would hear me up above, at the time it seemed like a logical thing to do. After which I did investigate the steep bank I would have had to climb to get to the back door. I should have just gone right back to my car.

Out of that sun just coming up over the ridge there came a vision of snarling lips and long sharp teeth. The sun had acquired a malignant face. The mirage transformed before my very eyes into a very aggressive looking golden retriever. It moved down the steep slope barking and snarling at me. My mentor had suggested I carry dog biscuits. Did I have any? No.

Because of my exploration for another entrance I was now on the wrong side of the car. The passenger side door was locked. I moved to the back as the beast moved toward me. Quickly I darted to the other side. So did the dog. The driver side door was unlocked but I moved back to where we started hoping to keep the car between me and it. There he was again at the front of the car. Again I rushed to the driver side. There was the dog opposite me and equidistant as me to the car door. The car door was safety, holy sanctuary if only I could attain it.

I could not now swear for certain that the theme music from "The Good, the Bad and the Ugly" was playing in the background as I faced off against the retriever but at the time... Time seemed to slow down as I began a mad dash to the handle of the door. I could hear the loose gravel fly back under my feet. I could see little puffs of gravel and dust rise under the dogs paws as it began its charge toward me. All seemed to be in slow motion. How could I possibly win safety when all hope had abandoned me? Suddenly I was there. At the door, opening the door, into the front seat and slam the door was closed. Where was the gnashing of teeth, the tearing of cloth and the rending of flesh? I looked out the closed

window to see.

Only you who can fathom the deep recesses of a dogs mind could possibly understand the irresistible attraction these creatures have for those things so primordial as to baffle most human sensibilities. I could see my nemesis there at the anointed front tire of my car sniffing every square inch of that tire. It had been impossible for the retriever to get past that front tire. What but a dog could be so completely distracted from its appointed mission by the aromas, no, the doggy perfumes emanating from this canine concoction. The little white poodle had saved my skin.

Had there been any one there to see it other than the dog chasing my car as I pulled away they would have judged it a very strange sight. There I went down the driveway hollering and laughing with glee. I roared a victory roar, with head back, as that golden retriever chased my car to the road.

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