SKUNK INVASION

The week leading up to the 4th of July was a bit crazy. There was something going on every day, and I was running around ragged. It sort of started the Sunday before when Autmn and I cut back the lilac hedges at the bottom of the driveway. I made the ‘mistake’ of letter her have the large branch cutters, and she was whacking at everything she could reach. Between the two of us we cleared a patch between the fence and the hedge, clipped the tops down so I could see over them from in the house, and thinned out the trunks. It was quite a process but we were proud of our work. Nate and Jen showed up just in time to help us bundle the branches in small batches. Our trash collector would not take loose branches or thick piles. I had 5 black trash bags plus 13 tied bundles, which we all lugged up the hill to the driveway, next to the road. It was exhausting.

Tuesday morning I woke up itching, and when I looked in the mirror I discovered that my neck, chin, and right arm were covered in poison ivy. I spent the next 3 days sloshing on Calaclear lotion and trying desperately not to scratch. My face was blotchy, my neck was covered in bumps, and my arm was red as a beet. It was not fun.

The impressive pile of trash and branches loomed at the road, waiting for pickup. When I came home from work on Thursday evening – about 8pm, very late – there sat the pile of branches. The trash bags were gone, and the cans were emptied, but the branches were still there. I just sat in the driveway, depressed, and wanted to cry. What in the world could I do with all those limbs? If I had to cut them all in little pieces and stuff them in trash bags, well…. It didn’t bear thinking about.

With a huge sigh, I went inside and finished my evening chores, which took me until almost midnight. I was stewing all the while about that stupid pile of lilacs. Grrr. Friday, however, I woke up determined to call my cousin Paul, who offered to come to my rescue if ever I needed it, to come and scoop up the branches and dump them in his woods. He promised he would do that, but it would be Saturday morning as he didn’t have his trailer with him. I agreed.

Friday I came home from work and stopped in the driveway, this time in puzzlement. All the piles of branches were gone. All that was left was one huge limb that I hadn’t cut or bundled, sitting by the road. Thinking Paul had changed his mind, I figured I’d try to cut up the branch and stuff the pieces in the trash bags – but not tonight. I got Autmn for the evening, went for groceries, did laundry, and fell into bed – again – at midnight.

My doorbell rang at 7am – I was still in bed! Grabbing my robe, I opened the door, and there was Paul with his truck and trailer.

“You called me over here for one branch?” he asked, thankfully more curious than irritated.

“No. Of course not. There was a pile as high as my car. I thought you changed your mind and got them yesterday!”

“Nope. Had to get my trailer.” He pointed over his shoulder at the trailer, which now housed my lone branch. “Where’d they go?”

“I have NO idea! Someone stole my lilac bundles!”

We both laughed, and he said it was no problem. He took the conspicuously empty trailer and headed home to dump my – branch. That was a mystery that may never be solved. Who in the world would want a six foot pile of bundled lilac branches, anyway?

Autmn and I got cleaned up and dressed and went off to Sarah’s baby shower at the church, and enjoyed seeing families and friends. When we got back, We again attacked another stand of lilac bushes, this time cutting them small enough to stuff into trash bags. She and Chrissy and I spend Saturday and all day Sunday cleaning up the yard, pulling weeds, mowing the grass, and sweeping sidewalks. I do say, it looked lovely!

All of this was really for a purpose, as my kids and grandkids were coming for a family picnic on Monday. I scheduled a vacation day to host them, in honor of July 4th and for Chase’s 8th birthday. It was glorious to have everyone there! An added bonus was that Matt and Peyton – and later Nate – helped trim lilac branches too high for me to reach that were banging against the shed roof. I feared they would compromise the roof shingles. They moved a cement garden bench for me, put new screws in a few loose planks on the bottom deck, and even built my fire pit. It was a great day!

As one of the trash bags was half full, we piled all the garbage from our picnic into the bag and tied it shut. Pickup would be Friday this week so we stacked all the bags beside the fence, between the garbage can and the air conditioner. The kids played ball in a downpour – and had a ball! (no pun intended) – and we walked down to the playground for half an hour before everyone packed up and left.

I went inside, cleaned up the dishes, leftovers, ran the sweeper, wiped the fingerprints off the windows and doors, shook the rugs, washed a load of clothes, and cleaned the upstairs bathroom. Chrissy had changed in there after her rain dance and it needed a little TLC. As I lifted the clothes hamper lid, I realized that the hamper wouldn’t push back against the wall. Ah, well, maybe a magazine had slipped behind. I pulled the hamper out, and low and behold, there are the floor – ‘sandwiched’ between the hamper and the wall – was a hotdog on a bun, with ketchup – scrunched against the baseboard. To say I was shocked to see an entire hotdog in my bathroom is an understatement. You just never know.

It was one of those days that you know you will never forget. For a variety of reasons!

And then, before the night was over, there was another reason to remember July 4th.

At 4:10am, I woke to a scratching, rustling noise. It sounded like it was above me, in the ceiling. I was familiar with squirrel in the ceiling, as it had happened at mom’s several times and gave me the creeps. I lay there, listening, worrying that the squirrel might chew through the wires and cause a fire in the insulation. I worried that they would invite their friends, build nests, and soon I would have an entire neighborhood in my attic, complete with shopping malls and educational facilities. I was tense and agitated and knew I couldn’t sleep listening to that racket. I slipped out of bed – but as I walked past the open window, I suddenly realized that the noise was NOT in the attic, it would outside my window.

What if someone were trying to get inside? THAT wasn’t happening! I yelled out the window – sure that if it were a person they would run. Nope, the scratching/rustling continued. I was being ignored. But I was also curious. I knew that whatever was out there wasn’t anything that I wanted in my yard, especially directly next to the house.

I tiptoed into the kitchen, turned on the floods, cautiously opened the door, and stepped onto the upper deck. I carefully moved to the end and looked over – directly above the biggest SKUNK I had ever seen! I stood frozen, not even sure if I should breathe. As I watched, his tail actually undulated and quivered, probably in ecstasy over the feast present to him in such abundance. Styrofoam plates were strewn all over the patio and yard, and trash littered the ground. He was going to town, no doubt about it.

Obviously, I could not scare him off. Any move I made could trigger his trigger. I’d heard stories - ask Kathy, for one!! – and wasn’t going there.

What if the a/c kicked on? Would it frighten him into letting loose? I turned and slowly went back inside, flipping off the light, then turning off the air conditioning. It was already almost 4:30am – how late do skunks stay up, anyway? Aren’t they in bed by dawn?

I knew I couldn’t lay in bed and listen to the skunk tearing my trash to shreds, so I grabbed a pillow and went into another room. I read for a bit, tossed and turned, and drifted into a fitful sleep.

When I woke at 5am, I crept to the bedroom window. All was quiet. I snuck back out on the deck. No undulating skunk, no rustling or scratching. Just trash everywhere. I sighed. I would have a mess in the morning, but for now I was going to bed. And let that be a lesson to me: ALWAYS put food bags down INTO the trash cans, not beside them, either near the house or out at the road. IN the can. That was the last Skunk smorgasbord I was going to host!

Except, of course, for my Skunk Hollow Cousins!