

A GOOD NIGHT'S REST

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There is absolutely nothing seasonal about this paper. At least, not the Christmas season. I can't even reconstruct the exact year in which these events took place. It must have been in the early 1970's.

I do remember, clearly, that it was spring vacation time for my children, and they wanted to go somewhere: ideally, to Florida. All their friends at school were going, they assured me. I would gladly have sent them or - better yet - taken them, but there was simply no money for a family excursion. With four children in private school, my wife and I were staggering under the burden of four tuitions. Florida was utterly out of the question.

Or was it? My brother was in the Air Force, stationed at [Eglin](#) Air Force Base, and that was in Florida - though the panhandle was not thought of in those days as particularly desirable or fashionable vacation land. But it was Florida nevertheless. And John and Sarah could accommodate about three guests. At least some of our children could look their classmates in the eye if they spent a week visiting their aunt and uncle in the sunny south.

And so it came to pass: my wife and our two daughters would go to Florida for a very low cost visit, and our two sons would be shipped off to Maryland to visit their grandparents. The ladies departed for Florida first, and I was left with the two boys for just one night before shipping them off to Baltimore.

I did what any responsible father would have done. I took them to [Frisch's](#) (the favored supplier of hamburgers in those days), then to the movies, then to [Graeters](#) for wonderful ice cream, and so home and to bed for a good night's sleep before their journey the following day. By ten o'clock, we were all in bed.

Sometime in the middle of the night, I woke up slightly and felt my son Fred getting into bed with me. He was about six years old at the time, and given to bad dreams. I turned over, put my arm around him, and was drifting back into deep slumber when something troubled me: through the mists of sleep I could clearly feel that Fred had his blue jeans on. But hadn't I put him in his pajamas before putting him to bed? I was sure that I had. What was going on?

I turned on the bedside lamp and there in my bed, with my arm around him, was a bearded man I had never seen before in my entire life! This was not my son: it was a totally unknown intruder and he was making some very [unfilial](#) advances.

I came out of that bed like a pheasant out of the grass. I don't know what the record is for the lying backwards broad jump, but I am positive that I shattered it. During the 1967 riots, I had acquired an M1 carbine, and kept it loaded, hanging on the wall by my bed. It was still there. I

grabbed the gun and leveled it at the intruder.

To my horror, he jumped out of the bed and came straight at me, evidently undeterred by my rifle. I remember so clearly that I had a fleeting instant in which to make a decision: to shoot, or not to shoot. Even under the incredible stress of the moment, I could see that he was a smaller man, and apparently unarmed. But he was attacking me in my bedroom. I had to defend myself.

And suddenly I knew what to do. In close combat training in my Army years, I had learned how to flip a rifle and catch an adversary under the chin with the butt of the gun. It all came back to me, and I struck him on his jaw with all the strength at my command. Boy, did it work! He let out a groan like a stunned ox and dropped to the floor, out cold. I stood over him with my carbine pointed straight down into his unconscious face... and I was shaking like a leaf. Waves of shivers and shudders swept over me. I was in shock.

But, even in shock, it was clear to me that the first thing I had to do was get some clothes on. Take it from me - you do not feel in charge of things, even with a loaded gun in your hands and an unconscious intruder at your feet, if you are bare-naked. Girding my loins became my absolute priority. So there I was, dancing about trying one-handed to get my legs into my underpants, while holding the gun on my adversary with the other hand.

That task accomplished, I called the police. They would be right out, they assured me. But in those days there was only one police car on night duty in the southern half of the county, and it was going to be a while. I sat on the edge of the bed, with my rifle pointed up the intruder's nostril, and settled in for a long wait.

I became aware of a stirring under the bed. With my wife out of town, I usually let the three bird dogs sleep there: such a thing was never permitted when the supreme authority was in residence. And those damned dogs - English Setters all of them - had never uttered a single warning growl or bark, or given even a passing thought to coming to their master's defense. There they cowered, while I seethed at their failure in the line of canine duty, and the outrage of it all.

The good news, however, was that the two boys had slept through the entire ruckus, and slumbered still, safely in their bedroom.

And then my adversary began slowly to regain consciousness. I could see his eyes focus on the gun barrel... and after a minute or two he spoke. "For God's sake," he said, "Don't call the cops." Little did he know that the cops were on the way.

But I wanted, above all else, to prevent any more violence. I reasoned that, if I could keep him talking, he was unlikely to come after me again. So I replied, "Give me three reasons why I shouldn't." And when he had done so, I distinctly recall saying - desperate to keep him talking - "Now, give me three more." It was the most absurd conversation of my life.

It developed that he had spent the evening in the Moonlight Bar, an unsavory dive in a

remote corner of **Clermont** County, and there he had met a lady of the night with whom he had arranged an assignation. She had given him instructions to her home and bedroom. She had even told him to leave his shoes at the back door, come up the stairs, and into the first room at the head of the stairs, and get into bed. Alas, he had missed a turn somewhere en route to the lady's home, and had wound up in my unlocked home, and in my bed rather than hers. And above all else, he feared that police involvement would result in his "old lady" finding out where he had been, and what he had been doing, and then the fur would really fly!

With never a drop of sympathy I heard him out, and kept him talking. And as I sat listening on the edge of the bed, with rifle pointed at him on the floor, I finally saw out of the window what he could not: a flashing blue light coming up the driveway. Help at last! But then I made my big mistake...

My objective was to get him downstairs, and into the arms of the law. So I said to him, "Your story has touched my heart. I have decided to let you go. Get up and walk ahead of me down the stairs." I had forgotten that the stairs faced the front door and that there were several small windows in the door. Halfway downstairs he looked through these, saw the policeman standing outside, and knew that he had been had. In a rage, he turned up the stairs and, totally ignoring my rifle (which he had probably figured I wasn't going to use anyhow), he came right at me... beating and punching at me with flailing arms. The policeman saw all this through the windows in the door. He kicked open the door and piled on. (Happily, he chose the right man to attack!) And then the serious fighting began.

It was like a barroom brawl in a grade **B** western movie. They tumbled, scuffling and punching, into the dining room. The intruder hit the cop a beauty on the point of the chin, and he went down on his knees. The intruder was gasping for breath, leaning against the wall, while the cop tried to shake it off. I stood there watching all of this, still in my underpants and **impotently** clutching my carbine. I called out to the policeman, "What should I do?" He looked up at me and replied, "Get the hell out of here."

I withdrew to the front hall as the policeman pulled his night stick from its ring. Horrible, squashy sounds came from the dining room, like someone beating a watermelon with an axe handle. And then all was silent except for the sound of heavy breathing. I looked into the room and found my adversary "**rockered**" on the floor. His hands were cuffed behind his back, his ankles were cuffed too, and he was bent backwards with his hands cuffed to his ankles. He was in bad shape, and he wasn't going anywhere. The policeman called for another car (which came quite quickly). They retrieved the culprit's shoes outside the back door, and loaded him up in the cop car. Tossed him in, actually. As they drove off into the night their parting words to me were, "I'll bet you never used to lock your doors at night."

And then all was silent. The boys still slumbered in their beds, in the room directly above the dining room. The dogs still cowered under my bed. And a shuddering reaction set in. Our whole lives are spent learning not to listen to the sounds a house makes at night... the creaks and groans as an old house settles, or the shutters rattle in the wind. An experience like this brings back your worst childhood fears. Every sound carries a warning:

"He's coming back... this time it's his accomplice... look out..."

I desperately needed to talk to someone. Even though it was three a.m. I called my wife at my brother's home in Florida. As I poured out to her my awful story she started giggling, and then laughing outright. I couldn't believe it. It was the only occasion in a long and *idyllically* happy marriage of nearly fifty years that she has failed me. For the first and last time in my life, I hung up on her. But I had to talk to someone. So I called my friend and boon companion at P&G, Norman Levy. And Norman was wonderful. Just what I needed, to calm my shattered spirits. A caring listener as always, sympathetic and consoling even in the middle of the night. He offered to come right over and keep me company. What a pal! I gratefully declined his thoughtful offer, hung up, felt a little better, and sat down to wait for daylight - and listen to the house.

The next day, it turned out that my adversary had a record of mostly minor *offenses* - *DUI* and car theft kind of stuff - and was out on probation at the time. I was determined to send him back to jail. I wanted a pound of flesh. I had been truly terrified by his intrusion and my home had been violated. What might have happened if I had been out of town, and my wife and children had been in the house alone? Alas, the judge in *Batavia* took a much lighter view of the affair, which sounded so improbable and kind of funny to him, too. He just extended the man's probation and gave him a *talking-to*. The cop and I were appalled.

But there was still more to come. Later that summer, I was on my tractor happily mowing my front meadow when I looked up and saw a sheriff's deputy striding purposefully across the field. He served me with papers advising me that I was facing both prosecution and a law suit for having shown unnecessary violence that night, and broken my intruder's jaw with my close combat rifle butt-to *the-chin* maneuver. I called my attorney and friend Harry *Santen* to report this, which seemed a wonderful joke to me. But to my astonishment, Harry said we had to take it seriously. I never knew exactly what he did, but he made it go away.

And that ends my tale. The policeman was right: I started locking the *doors* that very night, but eventually fell out of the tiresome habit. But the M1 carbine still hangs by my bedside and seems vaguely comforting, though it collects dust, and it is entirely clear to me that I will never pull its trigger in anger.

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