

THE GARDEN HEIST

- by Bud Busby (a true story)

Hi, my name is Bud. I'm 12 years old in this story.

It was summer in 1971. Me and my brother and sisters had been gleaning the fruit from the vines and trees of Portland Oregon since arriving from the Milwaukee Wisconsin area in 1969. They tasted so good! This was the North end of the famed Willamette Valley, the destination of so many of the Pioneers on the Oregon Trail. Not as much now but, back in the days of our childhood there, most houses had some kind of fruit tree; vines; or garden planted. Our house had a huge blackberry bramble as high as a house at the far end of the backyard. It was the combination of weather; soil; and I suppose the remnants of the homesteading spirit that conspired to make a fresh snack on the run so possible for a kid in the north end of the Willamette Valley.

I didn't know that I was eating apples that I would later in life consider to be the best I would ever have, and that I would forever be disappointed, in every piece of fruit or berry to follow later in life. Back then, we ate up the summers and laughed at the winters, and the rain...I don't remember it.

I was out back behind our old Montavilla, American Bungalow style, rental house, shooting arrows at a target attached to a hay bale, while running, with the deliberately designed thought that, a grizzly was bearing down on me, making his charge (I had to know that I could make that shot under pressure)... I had read every book at the public library in the young adult shelves, and then some, the protagonists in the books I read, they would've done the same (heh heh)

I made the shot. The grizzly, he took an arrow to his open growling maw!

I then became aware of someone else grizzled, in a sour mood, and standing five yards off to my right. It was Mr. Yarger, (name changed due to memory deficit disorder, just kidding, there's no such thing) he wanted words with me! I realized right off what was about to happen, it dawned on me pretty quick, since I then at that moment knew my sisters were watching things about to unfold from their darkened vantage point, behind their back bedroom window. I could almost see them biting their lips for quiet and the tension in the air.

Maybe this is where I should remark on what I knew my three sisters 10,11, and 14 had most recently been doing that has Mr. Yarger so serious, chin up and forward, standing squarely within range of my bow...

Or did Mr. Yarger very wisely wait to make his presence known until after I had spent the arrows on the gaping mawed, charging grizzly bear? Okay I'll give old Yarger that smartness, he turned out to be just that sort. Please read this part that way, giving Mr. Yarger full credit for smarts. He earned it, you'll see.

In my head at that moment I knew Mr. Yarger lived four houses away on the corner. He had a big unfenced yard. He had a garden. It was nicely ripened. I knew those things like a baker knows his bread is done. And I knew my sisters had designs on all those veggies. It all came together as I stood pinned to the ground by the righteous yet calm indignation of the man who had tilled; furrowed; seeded; watered and weeded the garden my sisters had set off to do a pilfering job on earlier: the garden job I had turned down. Beth, Cindy, and Lori had seemed a bit too excited, close to frenzied I'd say, for the thought of filling the fridge for Mom who had been coming home from her factory job, sometimes unable to walk upright up our front steps and through the door. I wanted the vegetable drawers filled too, but there was a code for those who ran our trails. I felt uneasy about the fervor that had my sisters worked up, I could always get fruit for an occasion of a summer, there might be trouble with all this fervor for veggies.

Anyway, I was knowing all of those things and there the man was whose vegetables I had noticed earlier were enhancing our refrigerator's contents saying, "Someone has torn up my garden. They took all the green peppers, they took tomatoes, cucumbers and carrots, zucchini, beans and corn, almost half my crop. Why the peppers, they didn't pick them, they took the four plants and yanked them from the ground!" (Mom loved to make stuffed green peppers. Not that she had anything to do with garden thievery. No sir). "And that's why I'm here," he continued, "Look at this trail of soil leading from my garden, across these back yards, to right here" he said severely, pointing to the black clumps of dirt at his feet. "Who did this? Who raided my garden!?"

There it was. Now what to do with it? Mr. Yarger had pretty much solved the crime and he deserved an answer. But I couldn't just sell my sisters down the river could I? What would that make me? Boy, I was wishing that my older brother Steve would have been around when I had bowed out of the garden heist. He would've put an end to that nonsense real quick. I don't remember us ever getting into trouble when he was around. Except for the firecracker incident on the coast that lit up a few brambles there.

"Well," I said, "I did it". Don't remember why but that's all that I could come up with. Maybe it was that none of the heroes in all those books I ever read were tattlers. Maybe I thought it would be brave to take the blame. I was after all standing there holding the bow that had just loosed an arrow at a bear and killed it. How could I say any different, and with my sisters behind me certainly hoping for relief.

Mr. Yarger went silent for a moment looking at me then said, "I don't think you did it, I think you're covering for someone." His voice had softened, "I wish you all would have just asked me. I would've given you the produce, now my garden is all torn up."

Some people said we were good kids. Some said we were a menace. I guess we were sorta like pirates. It all depended on which movie you went to see. Pirates, yes pirates I say, after all the dog (Spike) Mr. Yarger was soon to acquire for crop protection... well, Lori would have a new dog for a spell.

The End

P.S. Don't worry he got his dog back.... sorry Mister!