

Skunks

by Jake Barnes

When my wife or I go outside at night, we do the skunk dance. It's an easy dance to master. You just stand in one spot and stomp your feet. You can waggle your arms and bob your head if you want to. This lets a skunk know that you are there. Like I say, if you don't surprise them, they won't spray; they'll skedaddle.

I tell people that we leave out food for the creatures to appease the skunk gods. Some people laugh; some look at me as if I should be committed. If they stick around I tell them what happened to my friend Pat.

Pat Olson was a college buddy. For years he and his wife had a gift shop on a lake in Minnesota. It was called the Swedish Timber House because that's what it was. Pat's wife was from Sweden, and they had a timber house disassembled and shipped over here. Inger's uncle and brother came over to rebuild the house, a long, low building like an Indian sweat lodge.

Like many people in the hinterlands, Pat and his wife had no love for animals. Animals were groceries; that's about it. Pat had it in for the skunks especially. They dug up the yard, he said. He would trap them and dispose of them by going down to his dock and dropping the trap with the skunk in it into the lake.

One time he did this, Pat hurt himself. The skunk was a big fellow, and carrying it down to the lake, Pat felt a sharp pain. He went to the doctor, and they did some tests and discovered that not only did Pat have a hernia, he had colon cancer as well.

Pat survived the operation. Then, five years later, he was diagnosed with cancer of the liver. He died a year later.

