

I made a mistake two weeks ago that has had repercussions. And I have gotten my comeuppance. I won't make this error again.

I should never have violated Muzzy's confidence and trust by revealing the inalienable rights of cats. That action came back to haunt me, and it will for some time to come.

For awhile, I didn't think anything about it. Cats can't read, after all, I thought. But, then, a few evenings ago, Muzzy looked me in the eye with a very strange expression on his feline face. He looked like he had just had an epiphany of sorts. I ignored it. After all, cats can't do that sort of thinking, can they? Can they?

A couple of days ago, we cleaned up most of the maple syrup equipment and put it all away in the little sap house. We didn't, though, shut the door at that time, since the sap pan itself, the last piece of equipment to shine up at the end of the season was still in the wood shed. That day, Muzzy went out for a stroll, perhaps thinking that he might take up rodent patrol now that it was not uncomfortably cold outside.

But, when he came back to the door, I was shocked. Muzzy—a cat of the purest snow white except for his gray tail and a couple of gray spots—was now entirely gray. But, it was not the shiny, clear gray of his tail and patterned head. This was the dirty, dull gray of—yes, ashes and soot. He had gone into the sap house and rolled thoroughly in front of the fire arch, in sand liberally enhanced with black and gray residue from the fire.

Muzzy looks awful. And, he acts particularly proud of himself, rolling on the floor to show off the fact that his tummy, too, is now gray.

I would never attempt to give Muzzy a bath. The one cat I bathed was Puddy, a mother cat that had been sprayed full in the face and head by a skunk. When we were finished, the cat still smelled like a skunk, but I was wet as a fish and all scratched up as well.

Muzzy will have to let his new color wear off, I guess. He doesn't seem to be a bit concerned about it. He isn't fond of rain, so the soot won't be washed away by Mother Nature. Muzzy's face is now almost clean, and his front paws, too, just through use. The rest of him may be gray for a long, long time.

And, I won't be so brash and go about telling tales on the animals in this household. I see now that it can lead to grief.

I wonder sometimes what particular things frighten little children. I'm sure that the triggers for fear are much different from generation to generation. I remember one boy in the family who was afraid of going down the drain with the bathtub water. I have read that it is a common fear for small kids.

Times have changed since my toddler days, when I was afraid of, among other things, "short-wave radio." That may seem fantastic to some people today, but the big radio we had—useful for listening to the news, the baseball games, and Our Miss Brooks—also had a switch that changed it to short wave, where any number of different languages and staticky sounds could be heard. For some reason, that scared me. When our mother and dad were not listening, my siblings sometimes threatened me with short wave. My fear of a

popular radio comedy show, though, was more understandable. I was sure—and nobody could convince me otherwise—that the Red Skelton show was about red skeletons, and who in the world wouldn't be afraid of them?

Guess I will have to ask the young parents in the family what scares children today. Perhaps, they are more sophisticated in this technological age, but, as they get a little older, it is quite obvious that what many are afraid of is the malfunction or nonfunction of their electronic devices.