

THE WRITERS' BEAT

EDITED BY ANNIE DAWID

"Creature Visitations" by Annie Dawid

Part I.
Rats

Until this summer, I had never seen the mythical packrat, though I'd heard tales aplenty, down at the Anonymous Artists of America commune in Huérano County. "Oh, you can't go in that cabin," a member told me; "the packrats have taken it over," pointing to an ancient hippie abode sagging off a cliff. I looked in the windows and saw only mounds of stuff – unidentifiable heaps of matter pillowed all the way to the sill.

Seven years in our cabin, and of the rodent family, only sweet little mice had visited. The first clue was lollipop wrappers. My son had been given a few Tootsie Pops, and he deposited them on a table for another day. In the morning, I found three crisp wrappers on the floor, but no candy. Odd. Then the scat appeared, at least five times bigger than mice scat. I began to worry. One night, while playing Scrabble on the bed, my son suddenly yelled, "What was that?"

Out my right eye, I, too, sensed movement. Since our solar was down – awaiting new batteries – I used a flashlight to peer behind the fridge, and just there, beside the pilot flame, was a creature, a hundred times larger than any mouse, staring me down.

What to do? My son wanted to pummel it with a golf club. I said no. Maybe I could knock it out with sort of

toxic spray – deodorant? – then transport its unconscious body to a new home in the distant trees. I sprayed. We waited.

After five minutes, we wrestled with the refrigerator: no body. That rat had fled! So I bought traps: live ones as well as the killing kind, and set both.

Clearly, we could not all cohabitate in our tiny cabin: my son, myself, the dogs, and the hugest rodent in the universe. A day later, one red woodrat met its end behind the stove, its bushy tail as long as its dead body, squirrel-like. Could there be more? I re-set the trap and found Junior the next day. So far, end of rat story.

Part II.

Porcupine(s)

You already know how this story ends: the Porcupine wins. My Beloved and his two sons traveled from Denver for their first visit to our foreign country life. Dinner went fine, all the boys getting along, and afterward, singing the pop music their father and I can't stand. We were pleased, believing our first Brady Bunch night had gone well, when the door burst open and all three boys screamed. Leaping up from our books, we saw Fred, my rescue-dog-with-severe-anxiety-on-doggy-Prozac, careering around the room in pain, his face a bloody pincushion.

Shock.

Earlier, I'd heard the dogs barking and assumed they were chasing

a rabbit. But here was Fred, a veritable monster, howling, attempting with his paws to get the quills out of his face, only pushing them in deeper.

Immediately, I went into high calm emergency mode. After coaxing Fred to me, I linked his collar to a cable, hooking him to the porch railing with little room to move. We wrapped his body in a rug, trying to soothe him. My Beloved held him while I used the needle-nose pliers, hating the task but knowing I had to do it. Midnight before Labor Day, we were 90 miles from any emergency vet.

When Fanny showed up, she had maybe 7 quills on her face, which I quickly extracted. (She's the smart dog.) After three hours attempting to remove the porcupine's weapons – there had to be at least 200 of them, in his mouth, cheeks, ears, muzzle – while Fred resisted, once slipping out of his collar to run away and return, I gave up. Perhaps I'd pulled thirty or forty, but dozens and dozens remained. Clearly, he would have to be sedated. Outside, the boys slept on the deck under the stars, exhausted Fred cabled where he couldn't rub against anything, and I did not sleep, conjuring worst-case scenarios. At dawn, we left for Pueblo, where a wonderful emergency hospital fixed Fred to the tune of several hundred dollars. His right cornea was abraded, but when the vet told me about another dog quilled right through the pupil and blinded, I felt fortunate.

Today, Fred is fine, his eye fully recovered. I am poorer, and the new blended family weathered its first emergency. The porky-pine, as the boys call him, roams free, indifferent to the dumbness of dogs, ever secure behind his natural armor.



Annie Dawid's third volume of fiction, **AND DARKNESS WAS UNDER HIS FEET: STORIES OF A FAMILY**, won the Litchfield Review Award for Short Fiction. It is available on amazon.com. Her story: "The Fox Breaks the Code," won the 2008 Short Short prize on www.literal-latte.com. A former professor of English at Lewis & Clark College in Portland, Oregon, Annie is raising her son, Isaiah Max, and two dogs, Freddy and Fannie, in her cabin outside of Westcliffe at 9100 feet in the Wet Mountain Valley.

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Oh Ye Ghosts & Goblins, Everywhere!

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Museum presents the 2011 Ghost Walk Tours.

Starting at the Cripple Creek Jail Museum (located at 136 West Bennett Avenue) and ending at the Cripple Creek District Museum (500 East Bennett Avenue), participants will be treated to a FREE walking tour, complete with hair-raising tales of the ghosts of Cripple Creek - sure to chill you to the bone!

Tours are approximately 90 minutes long. Transportation will be provided back to the Cripple Creek Jail Museum following the tours. Reservations are not required, and tours may be postponed or canceled due to



inclement weather. Walking Tours may be difficult for those with health problems. For more information, please call the Cripple Creek District Museum at (719) 689-2634.

The Pueblo Domestic Violence Community Task Force, Inc. and the YWCA of Pueblo will present the Ghost Walk through the Historic Union Avenue District on October 1st, 7th and 8th.

Walking tours leave every 15 minutes from 5:30 to 8:30 p.m. starting at La Placita of El Pueblo History Museum.

This event is a storytelling of Pueblo's past. In case of bad weather, the event will move indoors.

The stories for this year's Ghost Walk include: Congressional Medal of Honor Recipients, LaLlorona, Pretty Boy Floyd, Elwin Slater, Pueblo Policeman and Dr. Corwin.

There will be a total of ten (10) vignettes presented throughout the heart of the district.

Tickets are \$8.00 and children ages five and younger are admitted free when accompanied by an adult. Tickets may be purchased at the YWCA, 801 N. Santa Fe Ave., and at El Pueblo History Museum, 301 N. Union Avenue.

Learn about Pueblo's Congressional Medal of Honor recipients – the reason that we are called the "Home of Heroes".

Listen as the legendary LaLlorona bemoans her lost children and her squandered life!

Hear from Pretty Boy Floyd about his life as a gangster and his capture in Pueblo.

Ghosts walk the streets of Florence and you can too! Dress warmly. Start at the Senior Center, 100 Railroad at 6PM and hear all the gory stories. No kids under 13.

Tickets are \$6 - \$10 and reservations are recommended since group size is limited. Call 719-784-3544