

Robbing Chip to pay Dale?

Pretty much every day, I spend some time on the verandah at home.

When I first get home from work, I plant myself in my favourite wicker rocking chair to contemplate the day I've just put in, usually a cold one in hand.

First thing in the morning, I often take my mug of tea out after finishing breakfast, just to mentally plan my day.

And on the weekend, the verandah is my place to relax between chores.

Sometimes The Sidekick and I sit there well into the evening, watching the three or four cars meander down the road during a five-hour period.

Whenever out there, there's one common denominator, that will always occupy my attention—it's the squirrels.

Now to be perfectly honest, I'm not a real fan of those furry little movers and shakers. They have a passion for chewing their way into the attic of old farmhouses— like mine— creating havoc in the process.

But at the same time, they can be downright entertaining as they go about their frenetic activities in the yard. And from my seat on the verandah, I have the perfect vantage point to catch all the action.

I swear there's gotta be a zillion squirrels scurrying around the property, chasing each other, jumping out of the way of dive-bombing barn swallows, or running to the safety of a nearby tree whenever that big black stray cat decides to try to catch one for dinner.

But this time of the year, those overly agile rodents spend most of their time gathering walnuts, to the point of obsession.

There are dozens of walnut trees dotting the property at home, most of them the result of the squirrels themselves. They bury the walnuts in the ground, then forget them, and eventually, some of those buried walnuts actually grow into trees.

Recently, I watched one of the less intelligent grey squirrels carry a walnut in its mouth, stop,

Ted Brown



shell the green skin off it, then place it in the grass, and 'pull' the grass over it. (Like I said, not the sharpest squirrel on the grounds.)

Along came another, a black one, who picked up the 'buried' walnut, carried it over to the base of another tree, then buried it in the soft topsoil where the grass seed never sprouted.

Soon after, a red squirrel came along, spotted the freshly dug earth, dug out the walnut and headed up a tree, to put it inside.

The Sidekick and I talked about it, imagining what the conversation between the three squirrels might be like later that day.

"Hey man, I found a great walnut, freshly fallen from the tree," said the first one, "All I had to do was skin it and bury it."

"Yeah?" said the second, "Well I found one already skinned, and I just put it in my secret stash. Never even had to skin it at all."

"Big deal," said the third, "I found one right at the base of my tree, and I just had to uncover it and take it up to the hollow trunk of the tree."

Now I could make fun of those squirrels, and laugh at the fact they are actually robbing Peter to pay Paul (or would that be robbing Chip to pay Dale?), and storing them in the damndest places.

But I take great joy watching all this happen. 'Cuz when they're doing that, they're not storing them in the attic of my old farmhouse.

(Ted Brown can be reached at tbrown@independentfreepress.com)

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