



"Domestic vs. Wild"

Have you ever wondered what you might do if when walking on a trail with your beloved dog, or lounging in the serenity of your own backyard with Fido by your side, and your tranquil space is invaded by another four-legged creature? Would Fido be protective of you, would their inner beast surface, or would they hide their tail between their legs and hide behind you? I would like to believe that my two year old, part Mantle Dane, Gollum, would growl, bark, and then stand by my side scaring the creature away. But as I found out recently, that isn't always the case. Last Wednesday as I was preparing for a trip downtown, I had been loading my SUV with the recyclables to take to the recycle center. I was walking toward the stairs to my deck, with Gollum tagging closely behind, when all of a sudden he barked once, then darted toward the back of the cabin.

At first I thought he was chasing after a squirrel that was eating out of the birdfeeder, which is truly his favorite pastime (chasing the little tree climbers away from the food meant for all the beautiful birds we have around here). But as I quickly found out he had seen a bear coming from behind one of the Mountain Laurels. I began yelling at him like I had never done before, then quickly ran inside and grabbed the compressed air horn I keep

next to the door as part of my "Scare-a-Bear" kit. I ran back outside blowing the air horn as I was running and here comes Gollum with his tail between his legs. I couldn't decide if it was because I was yelling at him louder than I ever had before, or the sound of the shrieking air horn, or intimidation from the bear. All I knew was that I was glad he had come to his senses and had come running back to me all in one piece.

I then sat down inside with Gollum by my side, petting him, and thanking "Saint Francis of Assisi" for protecting him. I began to wonder what I would do if we came face to face with a bear (or another one of our sundry of creatures that live around us) while walking on a mountain path and Gollum decided to protect me and attacked the wild animal. I would like to believe that I would yell at him and he would have come running back to me! But what if he didn't; what if he got into an all out brawl with the wild animal? Instinctively I believe I would continue yelling, then pick up the largest stick or rock nearby, and hit the wild animal with it. I know I would never forgive myself if I idly stood back and watched the two of them fighting to the death or severe injury that would inevitably incur. After all it is survival of the fittest and I would like to believe my best friend would be the fittest. But in all reality he is no comparison to the three hundred pound bear, or a wolf, or a fox, or a puma, or a coyote that we may encounter while enjoying the peaceful mountains. What would you do? How would you react if

this happened to you and your faithful companion?

My roommate had a Chihuahua that he often worried about when she was scampering out in the yard. The fear was that she might have encountered a woodland creature bigger than her (*but then the squirrels are bigger than she was!*). Hopefully she would have the sense to run away from the creature rather than becoming an hor'deurves! (*Sadly she passed away of old age, seventeen, earlier this month*).

What makes a small animal like a Chihuahua believe it is any kind of challenge for a creature that may weigh thirty times more than she does? In one chomp she would be gone without a trace! I have heard many stories through the years about domestic animals having confrontations with wild animals and usually losing the battle. One such story was at a park in Atlanta. A young man was walking his three small dogs when a large hawk swooped down, grabbed one of his precious companions and lifted it up into the air. Thank goodness he had them on a leash, otherwise it would have become a scene from the "Wizard of Oz", where the flying monkeys grabbed Toto and Dorothy and carried them off to the wicked witch. Thankfully the dog at the park came out of it with minor cuts from the hawks' claws. Some of the other stories I have read about have not had such a pleasant ending. *Oh yeah, Toto and Dorothy also came out of it unscathed.*

So remember when walking along one of our

beautiful "Paw Paths", or while sitting in the serenity of your deck or patio, to keep your faithful companion near and dear, so as not to allow them to become a victim of the wild.

