

The Squatters

by
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I ran into a friend today on Fox Run at Glenview Country Club today... Sandra was her name and golf is definitely her game. She mentioned she enjoyed last week's column and that her roommate Dr. E. reads all my articles faithfully and thinks I do a very good job. I responded by saying I had always thought Elizabeth was very astute and her liking my column just confirmed that.

As Don, Ron and Tom and I played a fairly good game, on this absolutely beautiful day I thought just how fortunate we were to be where we are and to have the friends we do. For some disjointed reason my mind then went back 50+ years into my past and my head was filled with images of my dad and his friends enjoying each others company in the front yard of my grandmother Holbrook's home. They didn't have golf as a pastime where they lived... fishing and hunting were their normal things to do when not working in the hay and wheat fields. But when they weren't doing that you could usually find them in the shade of the front yard, squatting in a semi-circle doing what men do while squatting.

Besides seeing who could tell the most bodacious lies, some would be whittling whistles out of a small, green maple tree branch for us kids who would hover around them. Every now and then they would spit 'baccy juice off to the side or over their shoulder so we had to be careful where we would sit on the grass. As a kid the truly amazing thing about the whole affair was not the lies, or the whittling or the spitting, but the squatting. I marveled at how these grown men could squat for hours at a time and never fall over. I suppose my amazement was spurred on by my non-squat-ability... I was ashamed to let it be known that I couldn't squat... not even for a minute. My legs just wouldn't cooperate and allow me to join in. The other kids could and I thought maybe it was because I was just the city kid visiting and only country boys were blessed with this God given talent. I would ask my cousins how to squat and they would laugh and say, "Just sit your butt on your feet and lean back on your heels." Can you visualize me trying to put that instruction into practice? It just wouldn't happen.

Even back home in the city my non-squat-ability would shame me at Sims Skating Rink. Besides the normal skating that all rinks have our rink would have Saturday afternoon races with a boy squatting way low while a girl pushed from behind. When a girl would ask if she could push me in the race I would hang my head and quietly tell her I couldn't squat. I would then offer to be her pusher but, of course, none of them wanted to be teamed up with me. I would see her later whispering to the other girls on the sideline, pointing in my direction and all of them laughing. Then

they would all squat down and have someone push them around the rink... looking and laughing all the way. Even the girls could do better than me, but I justified the situation by reminding myself that girls were born as squatters and practiced it all the time. Judy said she can remember me being a squatter and not a pusher but I know she was mistaken... or just trying to make me feel better and lift my spirits. This freakish malady has bothered me all my life and now, in my autumn years, I felt it was time to come clean before the world and confess my non-squat-ability to help free myself of all my angst. I appreciate you letting me vent this way.

Of course, writing on a subject like this makes a man think, "Where did the word squat come from and does it have any other meanings?" Other than a definition of "*a den for hares*" the only thing I came up with were those "*land grubbing, water hogging, sheep herding squatters*" who were the perennial victims in Grade "B" Westerns when I was growing up. I'm sure you're familiar with those poor homesteaders who risked their lives to come west to carve out a piece of the frontier for their own "spread," only to be shot, drowned, hung, or wrapped in their own barbed wire by the rich, evil, no amount of land is ever enough, meat eating, cattle barons who were willing to do anything to protect their range. However, if you look real close at those cowboys gathered around a campfire I bet you'll see the real squatters, telling lies, spitting 'baccy juice, and whittling whistles for a kid somewhere.

For those of you out there whose squat-ability has never been a challenge, please remain sensitive to those of us around you who could be hurt very deeply by the phrase, "You don't know squat!"

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