

The Escalation and Ricochet of Sin

A cold clear river slid lazily past our little camp. The afternoon sun, slung low, was casting a brilliant shimmer which danced soothingly over the old tributary's wrinkled skin. Two freshly caught trout were roasting over a crackling fire.

We'd come to unwind and enjoy the Memorial Day weekend. Too bad four hundred other city dwellers were there looking for that same little sliver of peace on the river's bend. We were wedged in tighter than a sumo wrestler's spandex swim shorts.

My brother Heath tended to the fire as I gathered up a passel of wayward beer cans washed ashore from the masses of drunken canoers who'd tumped at the rapids upstream. I stacked them carnival style and pulled out my little Red Rider B.B. gun. I was plinking them pretty good when Heath suddenly grabbed my barrel mid-shot.

"Watch out," I huffed, waving to emphasize how he'd almost caused me to shoot into a nearby tent.

"Better hold off on the B.B. gun," he warned, "Dude next door is liable to call the park ranger."

Sure enough the little fellow was stomping around snot slinging mad, although he didn't appear eager to make eye contact about it.

"It looks like he's suffering from the ricochetides," Heath surmised.

He was, of course, referring to the unreasonable fear of having an eye put out by a B.B. gun, as proliferated by the movie 'The Christmas Story'. Frankly I'd always thought it pretty ridiculous. Heath and I had shot at each other on purpose for years growing up, and we'd never been able to put out one. I was about to say as much when somebody on the other side of the stomping mad fellow plinked one of my cans into the river with his high powered pellet gun.

I stood up to question the audacity of who'd do such a thing. It was some yahoo in a cut off shirt t-shirt and terry cloth shorts. He stood there grinning, working a big wad of chew. When he noticed my eyes narrowing on him, he spat enough tobacco juice to drown a beagle. I may not have been the sharpest axe in the barn, but I recognized a challenge to my marksmanship when I saw it. I could practically hear the theme from 'The Good, the Bad, and the Ugly' playing. So I cocked my little Red Rider Rifleman style and reared up and fired all in one motion, one handed. A can went soaring. It wasn't exactly the one I was aiming at, but it was enough to send Mr. Terry Cloth to pumping up that pellet gun.

For the next ten minutes we went back and forth trick-shooting. I had my gun between my legs about to squeeze off a shot when I heard a safety click next door. It sounded like something a little more substantial than a B.B. gun. I looked up in time to witness Stompy Snotslinger emptying his .45 caliber automatic pistol into a small island just across the way! BOOM BOOM BOOM... about eight rounds in all.

A huge hush suddenly clamped down on the camp ground. Other than the soft scamper of folks ducking for cover, you could've heard a pin drop. Even the river seemed to stifle its trickle. I was glad I'd been able to stifle mine.

I noticed Heath was now conveniently standing behind a tree. It seemed like a good time to join him, so without making any sudden moves, I carefully set down my Red Rider. With a friendly nod to my naughty neighbor, who was suddenly emboldened to make eye contact, I backed over to the tree; keeping my hands in plain sight of course. I noticed Mr. Terry Cloth had already chunked his iron and dove for his tent.

But anyway- I reckon I learned right there on the spot how quickly things can ricochet if you don't heed the lessons of the Christmas Story; no, not the movie silly- the *real* Christmas story. The one where a baby named Jesus was born and grows up to give His Life to offer us forgiveness from our sins.

Jesus also came to open folk's blinded eyes so they could see clearly enough to live side by side without shooting one another! Boy, it was clear I had a lot to learn. To borrow a line from an old Park Ranger named the Apostle Paul- (*This is a faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptation, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners; of whom I am chief.* **1 Timothy 1:15** KJV)

Thankfully old Stompy Snotslinger chunked his pup tent in his trunk and squealed off before the Ranger showed. Later, Terry Cloth moseyed over to swap lies beside the fire. We talked late into the night of how we'd of had to plink ole' Stompy's eyes out if he'd of tried to turn that gun on us. Of course, the truth was, we were all still a little shaky about witnessing how truly fragile life can be, and how quickly a little sin can escalate, and ricochet back on you.

Guy Sheffield 11-06-07