

Dog Tales #3 – Raccoons and Falling Windows – The Hazards of Holy Salvage

An Occasional Column by Mike Whiteside, co-owner of Black Dog Architectural Salvage, Chronicling His Adventures While In Search of Salvage

Captains Log: My band of brothers find ourselves in the north country, heading for the Pennsylvania lowlands to bring down a full load of beautiful, 100-plus-year-old church glass mentioned in my previous column.

All the equipment is on site when we get to it. Now, if anyone wants to know how to safely recover a 10 foot x 12 foot arched piece of American stained glass from its perch 25 feet off the ground, I'm not your man. I can attest that it is no small feat.

Mission control gives me the go ahead to kick out the first one and I think I'm ready. Having a moment of clarity – maybe it was the second cup of coffee kicking in – and me being the high wire man, I decide to put a second safety strap on the window. Good thing. When this big beauty headed for the floor, all the strapping let loose, except for that last safety strap. Hmmmmmm. Devine intervention maybe? I didn't hear the harps playing. All I know is that we don't deserve to have this one.

The first day was filled with “OOPS!” and “OH BOYS!” but by grace and a bit of good luck, we get all the high glass on terra firma. The second day didn't provide too much drama, except for the Raccoon-In-The-Bell-Tower episode.

The old bell tower was minus the bell – obviously absconded by some previous salvage job and the advent of electronic bells – standing empty for who knows how long, except for the fine 12-foot glass panels that adorned her and a generous amount of pigeon poop. Looking like a Hazmat crew going in to a toxic dump, we help the tower shed its last shiny baubles.

Now the crew had been in the tower for a good hour and deserved a break. Upon returning and starting to finish the job, Jake Hill and Robert Kulp feel a presence looking at them from a corner of the tower. In my mind I hear the theme of *The Exorcist* – you know the one, “Tubular Bells” by Michael Oldfield? Turning, they see the largest raccoon to walk the face of the earth, reared up on its hindquarters and no doubt looking more like a Grizzly bear than a raccoon. First response is, DON'T MOVE! And second thought, where is the bathroom? My thought is where did this raccoon come from and

how long has it been there? Both guys in the tower look like a bad “B” movie moving in slow mo and reverse trying to get out of the danger zone without incident.

A nervous smoke, and trying to figure out how to finish the job around this menace, gives our adversary enough time to vamoose. Now where it went and where it came from is still a mystery. I think that this North American mammal was the reincarnation of Lon Chaney in “The Hunchback of Notre Dame.” We will never know.

The gathering continued for another day and a half. No more vermin, except for the human kind. We git it loaded and head home. What a job guys. All this wonderful American stained glass now lives at the Black Dog and awaits your call www.blackdogsalvage.com .

Black Dog Salvage flags are flying at half-staff as we lost a few of our own to the great beyond. Jacob Hill, my nephew, was a budding salvager in his own right and involved in a few of the larger projects undertaken by Black Dog this past year. His energy returned to the universe and I know that his 24 years of life touched many and that a star shines brighter with his love. Fair winds Jake. Don’t let that raccoon catch you.

My canine companion “Molly” – The Black Dog – by my side for the past 13-½ years succumbed to bone cancer. We know we can’t keep them forever but when they go, the unconditional love they gave is hard to replace. Molly was a better judge of character than most humans I know. Her presence and friendly grin as you walked up to the shop will be missed. Sally, the successor to the position of COD (chief operating dog), was trained well by Molly. Old for her year of life, she lives on as the greeter to all whom visit us here at Black Dog

Go find Jake, Molly.

The Dogs head to China looking for the real old stuff next month. I’ll let you know what we find. Bon Voyage.

Release the Hounds, Ya’ll.