

## WANNA BUY A SQUIRREL?

According to the *Cedar Grossing Gazette*, Sheriff Lackmeyer of Oak County says that federal and state officials have not abandoned their search for a still up on Rockford Mountain. The officials narrowed down the search to that area because of evidence of numerous cattle near the base of the mountain running and frolicking around the pasture for no apparent reason. The most plausible explanation given by the sheriff for the unusual activity of the bovines centered on the belief that somewhere up on the mountain, the still owner, either accidentally or on purpose, spilled the contents of the still into the creek that fed the stream flowing down the mountain. Hampering the investigation has been the apparent lack of any noticeable activity over the last two months. There have been several other theories suggested by members of the community, especially those patronizing the Bottom of the Mountain Saloon and Grill, but law enforcement officials have declined to comment on them. When interviewed by Jess Harper, reporter for the *Gazette*, the owner of the famed Saloon and Grill, Sonny Borden, mentioned that his sales have

shown a remarkable spike of 80% in the last two months.

Basil and Gaylord Hairston, newer patrons of the Bottom of the Mountain Saloon and Grill, have had a run of bad luck lately. It seems that the entrepreneurs had to close the business that they operated from their home up on Rockford Mountain about two months ago. Apparently, some of their operating equipment caught fire, and they had to throw the equipment into the creek to douse the flames. The resulting damage to the assets and the loss of inventory that the equipment contained proved too much for the businessmen. Capitalists that they are, they have been struggling to come up with another line of products to market.

Last Saturday, while sitting on their front porch in eerie silence for two hours, Basil suddenly said, “Squirrels.”

“Whatta ya mean squirrels, Basil?” asked Gaylord.

“We need to shoot us some squirrels and see if we can’t sell ‘em.”

“Reckon there’s a market for squirrels right now?” asked Gaylord.

“I ain’t sure, but the way I figure it is, if we can’t sell ‘em, at least we could get ma to make us plenty of squirrel pie.”

“Sounds reasonable to me,” said Gaylord.

So, the businessmen got up real early on Sunday morning and set about gathering an inventory. When they had their burlap sack filled, they sat down on a couple of old tree stumps to do a little marketing strategy.

“Well, Basil, we done got us a good supply of squirrels,” said Gaylord. “Who do you think’s gonna wanna buy ‘em?”

“I been ruminating on that, Gaylord. I thought about putting an ad in the paper, but these here squirrels might be a little ripe by the time the paper gets out. We need us a place right now, this morning, where there’s a bunch of people in one spot, so’s we’d have a better chance of making a sale.”

“Yeah, I see what you mean, Basil ... How bout that there church down the road? St. John, I think it’s called.”

“Gaylord, you’re a pure marketing genius. That’d be perfect.”

The two gentlemen stepped across the threshold of the church front door into a new world. In one of those pure, random, coincidental moments of time, just as they entered the church, Pastor Schmidt directed the congregation to stand up and welcome their neighbors in the pews. As Basil and Gaylord made their way down the center aisle, they just naturally assumed everyone had stood up for them. They shook people’s hands all the way up to the front of the church. As they stood up at the altar next to Pastor Schmidt, their hearts were pounding with joy at the welcome they had received. The duo never expected that their marketing plan would have such a successful grand kickoff. The businessmen had wild thoughts about all the squirrel sales they would amass. When those in the pews finally noticed Basil and Gaylord up front, the church became eerily silent.

“Thank you,” said Gaylord. “Thank you. Thank you very much. Basil and me feel overwhelmed by all this. Now Basil here has something to say ... Basil.”

Reaching down into the burlap sack, grabbing a squirrel, and holding it high, he inquired, “Anybody wanna buy a squirrel?”

Virginia Watkins in the first row immediately fainted at the sight of the squirrel. Of course, it wasn't all that unusual for her to faint, as she came from a long line of fainters. When Doris Lyons two rows back fainted, it was more out of respect for Virginia. Some suspected that Doris's fainting spell may have been influenced by the fact that she managed to faint into the arms of Buck Wilson, the most eligible bachelor in town.

Pastor Schmidt quickly pulled the boys into a huddle and said, “Guys, we're in the middle of a church service here and we don't usually try to sell items from the altar.”

“We're sorry, Reverend,” said Gaylord. “But, you see, we're hurtin for some money right now and we got all these squirrels.”

Sensing a hard sell, Pastor Schmidt then added, “The other thing is, guys, if we let you sell your goods inside the church, we could get in real trouble with the Internal Revenue Service.”

“I gotcha, Reverend,” said Basil. “We don’t want no trouble from them revenuers.”

“Why don’t you guys go outside, just off the church property, and wait for the service to end. When people leave, I’m sure you’ll be able to sell some squirrels.”

“Okay, we’ll do ‘er, Reverend,” said Gaylord.

As they walked back down the center aisle to exit, Gaylord waved to the people in the pews and Basil held a squirrel high above his head.

Basil and Gaylord positioned themselves on the side of the road, right at the edge of the church driveway. When the service ended, Pastor Schmidt positioned himself where he could shake the parishioners’ hands and still see the squirrel vendors. The first car to leave the church parking lot stopped about fifty feet from the road and the driver, Virginia Watkins, looked both ways down the road. With rocks and dust flying up behind her car, she gunned the engine so she could get out on the road without having to stop at the end of the driveway.

The salesmen hollered at each car that left, “Wanna buy a squirrel? Only two dollars.”

One man parked his pickup truck nearby, walked over to the two men, and purchased eight squirrels. He even gave them a four-dollar tip. Buford Douglas, the equipment mechanic and famous dispenser of valuable tips and information on a large variety of subjects, had been hankering for some squirrel pie himself. When Pastor Schmidt saw Buford walking over to the boys, he wasn't really surprised. With his eclectic taste in cuisine, Buford certainly fit the customer profile for the squirrel businessmen. What Pastor Schmidt saw next did surprise him, though. He later felt a little ashamed for being surprised. With their sale complete, Buford went back to his truck, grabbed his Bible off the front seat, and gave it to Basil and Gaylord.

With the last of the congregation gone, Pastor Schmidt walked out to Basil and Gaylord. By the time he got out to the edge of the road, the price for squirrels had dropped to 25 cents each, but their only sale remained Buford Douglas.

“Well, Reverend,” said Gaylord. “We stand here, in front of you, a might disappointed in our sales revenue.”

“Yeah, guys,” said Pastor Schmidt. “Sometimes it’s hard to know what to do. Maybe everyone had an ample supply of squirrel at home.”

“I reckon we’re gonna have to do some re-thinkin on the squirrel business,” said Basil. “We still got twenty of these suckers in here.”

“I tell you what I’m going to do,” said Pastor Schmidt. “I’ll give you twenty dollars for those last twenty squirrels on one condition.”

“Well, now, Reverend,” said Gaylord. “That’s a hard proposition to turn down. You got a deal.”

“But you haven’t heard the condition yet,” said the shepherd.

“Oh, yeah,” said Gaylord. “What is it?”

“I want you to take these squirrels home and make yourself some squirrel pie.”

“All right, Reverend,” said Basil, as he shook Pastor Schmidt’s hand. “We’ll do ‘er.”

Ignoring the squirrel blood and fur on his right hand, Pastor Schmidt said, “I see you have a Bible there.”



“Yeah, Buford gave it to us,” replied Gaylord. “He’s a nice fella.”

“Yes, he is. If you ever have a question about what’s in that Bible, feel free to ask me anytime.”

“Will do, Reverend,” said Basil. “And we’ll also be sure and let you know about what we’re gonna try to sell next.”