

Dan Price, ams 2/9/12

Gnats & Camels

There was an ancient rabbinic saying, "He that kills a flea on Sabbath is as guilty as if he killed a camel." Jesus of Nazareth modified this saying quite a bit when he scolded the scribes and Pharisees, saying: "You are straining at gnats and swallowing the camel." In other words, you are giving far too much attention to the little things and far too little attention to the bigger and more important things! Today Jesus is the Founder of the world's largest religion; in his time, ironically, he was a man who was often critical of religious professionals—especially those who were legalistic. So, it is no surprise that he denounced the Pharisees as blind guides who would strain at gnats—ie tithing their bits and pieces from their gardens—but swallow a camel. In other words, they were scrupulous in minor things of the Law, yet overlooked the truly important things of the Law like justice and mercy. The Pharisees and scribes were kind of like the prototypes for Ebenezer Scrooge. *Early Scrooge, that is.*

I am afraid we are becoming a society that strains at gnats and swallows camels. As a recent example, I cite the case of a local family who are building a tree house for their kids in Bayside. For building a tree house on the woods, on their own property, where almost no one can see it, they ran afoul of the law. So the family Robinson gets busted—for what? ~~for building a tree house!~~ Streamside management rules say that all structures (except tiniest ones) need to be at least 100 feet from streams; the tree house is about 86 feet from Jacoby Creek. The kids tree house is not wired, no running water, no toilets, no septic tank: just a couple kids working with parents to learn how to build a fun place to play in the woods on their own property a few yards from their home. I guess the message sent by local laws is they should have stayed inside watching TV and playing video games! because, Plot plans, photos and perhaps a site visit by the planners could all be required for the tree house to remain. And the cost of tearing it down could be passed on to the family. A tree house 14 feet closer to the stream than the law allows is a gnat!

Kids talk about the camels in the soup!

Meanwhile, untold numbers of pot growers and other illegal drug makers are sucking energy out of the grid, destroying houses by their indoor-grows, polluting the water with fuel spills, and toxic chemicals especially those chemicals used to make meth; the marijuana growers are producing a drug that increasingly deleterious to young minds and reduces the emotional stability of teens who use it for any length of time. The drug growers are fostering a culture that feeds on violence through drug deals gone bad and people protecting their grows at all cost. *Camels; the trend is to leave them alone!*

And, Where were the building inspectors when we needed them, when our leaders submitted plans for the Eureka County jail—a building that sits right on the main thoroughfare of our city and looks uglier than the dark tower of Mordor! But I digress... *back to the gnats!*

I am happy to report that Kirk Girard and Mark Lovelace did make a personal visit to the Robinsons after the treehouse article appeared in the Times Standard, and are planning to make an 'administrative exception' to the streamside rule for Robinson family tree house. Somebody ~~is~~ at least, focusing upon the camel rather than the gnat. [Justice tempered with a bit of mercy could go a long ways toward helping these local leaders—and countless others-- seem like reasonable people—not Scrooges, who delight in telling kids to stop learning and having fun.]

This has been Dan Price for Community Comment