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Playtime with javelinas beats a trip to the big box

A couple of weeks ago, a pack of javelinas chased me up an apple tree. I remained there for the better part of an hour.

I'd driven out White Spar for a hike through the apple orchard, parking on the west side of the road and hiking east. I returned through deep twilight, dark enough that I couldn't see the dozen javelina surrounding the truck until I was standing on the double yellow line.

I startled.

They startled.

I took a few steps backwards and the biggest one took a few steps forward. I took a few more steps back without taking my eyes off the pig. He kept coming. At which point I thought to myself: "You know... I've never seen a javelina in a tree."

So I turned around and ran up the nearest tree, the javelina in brisk pursuit.

He peered up at me. "Just stay there," I imagined him telling me.

He certainly did. As it got darker, the pig faded into audio off to my left. Cars went by on the highway, and their headlights assured me that the pigs still surrounded the truck. In the darkness, it sounded like they were EATING the tires or the bumper of my borrowed pickup.

How interesting, I thought to myself, to be stuck up a tree while clumps of cars passed only paces away. Over yonder, in my own transportation, two cell phones languished in my abandoned purse. I had nothing but an orange D-backs cap to shoo the buzzing occupants of the apple tree. But all told, I seemed OK. I had a strict no-gore policy and so far, everything was going according to plan. No pig had stuck his tusks in me yet.

I told my story to a few friends. At least one of them nailed the whole experience when she said, "But it was cool right? It was kind of fun?"

It was. I lived here nearly my whole life and have come across lots of javelina at night. Mostly, there's no problem – we've coexisted peacefully for decades – and honestly I'd rather risk a javelina tusk than live somewhere completely domesticated.

If anything, I wish we had more wild spaces in the heart of our city. We're lucky to have Acker Park. The city tried to sell it and concerned citizens fought the sale, managing to save downtown open space.

It's not the only wild space at risk. The last time I heard Gheral Brownlow speak, he chastised the city for not making better use of Pioneer Park. Right now, the Pioneer Park Equestrian Center Association (www.PPECA.org) is raising money to convert the hills and scrub into an equestrian park with arenas – to literally domesticate it.

Never assume that our city fathers will make decisions that align with our desire for quality of life. They have bills to pay and the shortest distance between those bills and paying them is continued growth and development. And open space doesn't pay the bills. Big boxes like Lowe's do that, but while the city does pay the spiraling salaries of our police and firefighters, it does so in the least creative and most expedient way possible. And our hillsides come down in the process.

Want to get involved in the wild side of Prescott? The Open Space Alliance of Central Yavapai County is a good place to start. They have weekly meetings and in September will host the Urban Wildlife Interface Symposium. According to my old schoolmate Ashley Fine, who's hip-deep in planning, the symposium will cover how to live with the critters we've got and how to plan for growth in a way that leaves vital wildlife corridors intact. Visit www.yavapaiosa.org for info.

–Erica Ryberg

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