

Buford

We all have a desire to fit in to whatever surroundings or circumstances we find ourselves in. It's just the way we are, being social animals and all. It is important to be mindful about the surroundings or circumstances into which we want to fit. Not all bodies of water are meant for swimming, like the ornamental fountains in Las Vegas. And even when they are, one must be mindful of social protocols. I'm sure we've all experienced the awkward social faux pas of being invited to a pool party and after a few drinks removed all of your clothes to join the other revelers in the hot tub, only to find out that you're the only one who has taken off your clothes. Okay maybe that's just me. Regardless, this will serve as a lead in to the next person of interest from the East Fork of the San Gabriel Mountains: Buford.

Buford looked like the stereotypical mountain man. And I'm pretty sure that he knew how the stereotypical mountain man was supposed to act. And so that's just how he acted. He was a postcard for the mountains, a caricature of wilderness living, the Brawny paper towel guy come to life. If the Brawny paper towel guy drank beer and ate cheeseburgers all day. Out of all of us backwoods dwellers, he was the one that indeed looked and acted the part. Problem being that it was all just an act. I'm not saying that we did not walk around sporting Pendleton's with our axes over our shoulders, just not all the time.

Buford was always very anxious to join in on anything "mountain man" that we were doing. He was just like a newly baptized Christian anxious to go on a mission trip, except for the foul smell and the really bad clothes. Buford, not the newly baptized... oh well you probably guessed that. If we were drinking beer, Buford was there. If we were barbecuing, he was right around the corner. He would even be right there with me if I were chopping firewood to store away for the winter. Right there drinking a beer and eating barbecued chicken watching me chop wood. Interesting thing about chopping wood; people have definite opinions about how it should be done. Some swear by the wedge, while the purist won't use anything but a good old ax. After about an hour of chopping wood, I'm a purist by the way, I was all in favor of a third option, a wood chopping machine.

In order to be part of the "in" crowd you have to hang out where the "in" crowd hangs out. Up in the mountains there were a select few places to hang out: inside the café and outside of the café. Well there was the swimming pool across the street at the trailer park, but I never felt particularly mountain-mannish in my maroon Speedo's. Hey give me a break, it was the Eighties. Buford liked to hang out in the store whenever he had a spare moment. And he had a lot of spare moments.

On one particular afternoon Big B was in the café harkening back about how nigh on thirty-three days ago when he first moved out of the city, it was a different, simpler time in the mountains. Just then we got a call about an injured hiker who needed to be airlifted out of the mountains. The sheriff's rescue helicopter commonly used the parking lot in front of the café as a heliport since it was nice and wide, kind of like Buford. Upon hearing the helicopter coming in to set down, Buford took it upon himself to go out and guide the helicopter in for a landing. Now here's a guy who has clocked four, count 'em, four weeks of mountain manliness and he already

has the presence of mind to go out and guide the whirly-bird in for a landing. I'd lived up there several years and had seen the copter land dozens of times, and never once looked at it approaching and thought, "I'll bet those poor slobs have no idea what they're doing, I'd better help!" But there stood Buford, in the middle of the parking lot, his arms extended above his head, bending them back and forth at the elbow as if to say, "Here, land on my head." I managed to stifle the urge to walk up to him like in the movie "Airplane" and ask where the men's room is. If any of you haven't seen the movie "Airplane" I suggest you watch it so you can get the humor of that last line.

About two weeks later as I sat in the store not doing much of anything, I noticed a rather rotund, shirtless man running down from the trailer park in what can only be described as a disgusting frenzy. Upon further observation I realized he was running toward the store with a rifle in his arms. As he closed in on the café I could tell it was Buford. I heard him shouting between gasps for breath that I needed to come outside. "Well, yeah" I thought, "I've got you running around half-naked in the parking lot with a gun."

Right when I opened the door to exit the café, Buford informed me that there was a problem in the trailer park. Intuitively I surmised that he meant something more than mothers covering the eyes of their youngsters as he ran past their trailers. I probably should have issued a warning similar to the ones you see on TV shows, "Some images may be disturbing to viewers" There's an understatement. So as the hot and damp Buford... Let me rephrase that. As the overheated and perspiring Buford briefed me on what dangers lay before us up at the trailer park, I couldn't help but wonder why, since he had a rifle and I was unarmed, he thought it a good idea to leave all the residents to fend for themselves. He explained that he had heard something creeping through the hills above the trailer park.

Buford...we call those critters.