

Down Home: Big cat's not cool in the neighborhood

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In 1921, advertising advocate Fred R. Barnard adopted an adage quoted around the world and attributed to everyone from the ancient Chinese, to a Russian novelist, to the French emperor Napoleon Bonaparte: "A picture is worth a thousand words."

Ninety years later, a couple of photographs circulating around our neighborhood summoned one accurate word from my wife, Joanna: "Scary."

Mary took the photos, and she passed them on to Kim. Kim forwarded them to Carol, who sent them to her husband, David, who e-mailed them to me. And I made sure they got to Jo.

They show a bobcat making herself at home in a backyard of our suburban neighborhood.

The operative words in that sentence are "bobcat," "our" and "neighborhood."

A couple of summers ago, the local rumor mill purported a bobcat had been spotted (Pardon the tame wild-feline joke; bobcats have spots on their forelegs and a black spot on their tail.) strolling in the 'hood. "Watch your pets," folks warned.

According to Wikipedia, "Though the bobcat prefers rabbits and hares, it will hunt anything from insects and small rodents to deer." For a while there, I got my hopes up, because (a) Wikipedia doesn't say anything about bobcats eating dogs, and I'm partial to our pup, Topanga, who should be safe, and (b) technically speaking, squirrels are rodents, and as far as I'm

concerned, we could accommodate a tantrum of bobcats if they would thin out our local scurry of squirrels.

If you keep up with this column, you may recall a squirrel just about decimated my third-favorite tree, the red oak in our backyard. So, if our bobcat decided to dine on squirrel stew, I'd chalk it up to divine retribution.

Wikipedia also claims the bobcat "uses several methods to mark its territorial boundaries, including claw marks and deposits of urine or feces." This, too, would be fine with me. If this would keep squirrels away, our local *Lynx rufus* is welcome to scratch "Bobbie the Bobcat" on the trunk of my tree and/or "do her business" on the branches. That should drive the squirrels away, providing my tree time to recover.

Our bobcat apparently lives in Grapevine Creek Park, an undeveloped stand of woods that stretches behind the homes down the street. And I'm thinking she's been roaming out in public in daylight because, like every other living thing around here lately, she's hot and thirsty.

You can imagine every little stream and pond in those woods evaporated awhile back. The way this summer is shaping up, the neighbors' swimming pools might dry out, too, and our bobcat would venture further afield. If it gets bad enough, she'll sniff her way over to Sonic and cool off with a cherry limeade.

Meanwhile, I hope he scares the squirrels, but not Jo and Topanga.