

ALAN PHELPS

Rodent's death haunts commune

The dead warrior expired on my lawn. The snow buried him because we wouldn't.

He had been known as Gherkin. Often he would terrorize the commune, flitting about the porch. Oh, he seemed harmless enough. But those beady eyes, that frightful stare — gave me a case of the willies a mile wide.

Oh, you could call him a simple squirrel. Many did. Some didn't. Hey, it's a free country. And he was a free squirrel.

Gherkin would venture often onto our porch demanding scraps of food. He wasn't much of a talker; squirrels seldom are. But he could outclimb us all any day.

The trouble with squirrels is that you never know what to expect from them next.

For example, The Seattle Times reported that a squirrel freaked out in Kirkland, Wash., terrifying 50 office workers. Employees at a real estate office said the squirrel attacked those who tried to escape. The responding police officer called for backup after his pants split during a chase.

When the squirrel was finally brought under control, he gnawed through a plastic cage, attacked a vet and ran off.

Police had few leads in the case. I can understand and sympathize with the peace officers. The other week on "Cops" I saw a squirrel rip through eight pairs of pants, handcuffs and a tin can — yet he still sliced through a tomato with razor-sharp precision. That's the beauty of squirrels.

Evidently, those who think about such things agree that squirrels become aggressive after we humans feed them. They come to expect those nibbles of people-food as a supplement to their regular daily diet of leaves, unattended babies and Live Sea-Monkeys.

Gherkin was one such squirrel. He probably lived in that tree in my front



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yard, up with the birds and those little blue-winged guys who follow me around and, for some reason, can be seen only by me.

Once in a while, Gherkin would lumber down the tree, wobble up to the door and sniff around. If we hadn't left him any old bread or girly magazines, he'd punch a hole in the screen door.

Gherkin was forceful like that. He knew what he wanted in life. He was the kind of squirrel to take a situation by the horns and then run up a tree.

He was also the kind of squirrel to die on our curb and begin to slowly deteriorate.

Thankfully, it snowed after that tragic event, and the evidence of Gherkin's demise was soon lost in white powder. I suppose that, deep in the collective memory of the commune, we knew a gallant squirrel lay beneath the tundra. But we put it out

of our minds. We chose not to grieve. We looked away, and a squirrel's soul suffered.

That was before the thaw, before the sun reappeared over the commune of Isle Broddick, before I went ahead and got that operation despite my parents' objections.

"It's my life," I thought, matter-of-factly.

It was before Apollo crossed the sky in his fiery chariot and warned the Earth, revealing once again that which was — or at least had been at one time — Gherkin.

It was somewhat surprising to see the little bugger still sitting there on the edge of the curb as though he were waiting for the first bus to the squirrel afterlife or something. He hadn't even packed a bag, I realized through a tear.

"Gherkin," I called in vain. "Gherkin . . ." My voice echoed off the nearby cliffs in a fearful way. "Gherkin . . . Gherkin . . . Gherkin . . ."

The squirrel tormented my thoughts. So did those cliffs, which I had never noticed before.

From that moment on, I always saw Gherkin sitting there right in front of me — except when I wasn't looking at him. Then, I didn't see him at all. Yes, those were the good times. Ah, that such times would return!

But when I walked through the early morning mist on my way to campus today, Gherkin stared at me making my way down the block. He looked a little thinner than usual; death hasn't been kind to Gherkin. But it was still him, all right.

It was still that pesky squirrel. Still waiting. Still watching. Still working on those damn origami projects he liked so well.

Maybe the rain will wash him into the gutter before long.

Phelps is a junior news-editorial major, the Daily Nebraskan managing editor and a columnist.

RAINBOW ROWELL

Undies should stay out of sight

Sometimes I wonder why I still live in a residence hall. I could move out. I could find a dozen or so friends to share some skanky apartment with me. I could get used to eating macaroni and cheese and Ramen noodles.

It all started Monday.

There I was, waiting in line at my residence hall cafeteria, minding my own business. I was trying to decide whether to have rice pilaf or taco surprise, going about my daily routine without any especial joy or misery.

Rice. Again.

I moved on to the buffet's fruit and dessert section, idly listening to nearby conversations:

"You want to see it now?"

"Yeah."

I turned to walk into the dining area, only to be confronted by a most unpleasant sight.

There, in the crowded dinner line, some girl had her jeans undone and her underwear pulled down on the side halfway to her knee, as she showed off a garish tattoo.

In the dinner line. In PUBLIC.

That's it. This is where I draw the line — the bikini line, in fact.

When living with a couple of thousand strangers, one expects to see unpleasant things. But, underwear? Tattoos? It's a residence hall, it's a cafeteria — not a wet T-shirt bar. And, in front of the apple pie? It's un-American.

Isn't there a law about indecent exposure in the presence of perishables? There should be — and it should be strictly enforced.

I'd like to see less time, money and energy spent terrorizing rappers and unwed mothers and more devoted to the real corruptors of youth — people who expose themselves in public.

I've been assured by someone who once worked at Younkers in the intimate apparel section that my experience was minor, at best.

"People would always pull up their shirt, or pull down their skirt to ask me if I recognized the brand they were



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When I left for college, I thought I'd left all that behind. I thought that until I married and had a family of my own, I wouldn't have to deal with anyone else's undergarments. In other words: I never planned on dealing with it.

If exhibitionism in the dinner line isn't traumatic enough, there's always the underwear bandit.

When people leave their laundry unattended in our residence hall's washer/dryer-filled basement, some weirdo actually sorts through the laundry stealing nothing but the underwear.

This happened to my neighbor. She left her Maytag alone for 10 minutes to make some popcorn, and when she returned she was missing a vital wardrobe element. She hadn't done laundry for a while, and they nabbed her whole supply.

She was pretty upset. For weeks, she had bizarre nightmares and lived in fear that her underwear would show up on a flagpole or on a drunkard's head.

As an optimist, I like to think this person really, really needs underwear, or that he or she distributes the stolen goods among the poor. It's probably the work of some perverted Fruit of the Loom cult.

Every time the bandit strikes, someone pipes up with the story of the guy the police supposedly found last year or the year before, or the year before, who had more than two thousand pairs of BLACK underwear in his car.

Everyone present gets an appropriately queasy look and then runs to her room to count her unmentionables.

Call me a puritan. Repressed. Upright. I can take it. It's probably true. But, please, please, keep your pants on at dinner.

Rowell is a junior news-editorial, advertising and English major and a Daily Nebraskan columnist.

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