

## **SOME LAWS ARE HARDER TO LIVE THAN OTHERS**

**by**

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There are laws and there are laws. In America we believe no person stands above the law and that the law is sacred. We believe that all people are entitled to equal treatment before the law, but don't necessarily believe the same to be true about the laws themselves. Not all laws are equal. For example, we don't think twice about speeding. Virtually all Americans treat speed limits as a "lesser" law.

The current prisoner of war abuse scandal has uncovered a few Americans violating the law. Not all Americans think the rules against mistreating prisoners are as "flexible" as speed limits, and the offending prison guards will be prosecuted. Yet, some people are sympathetic to the G.Is' situation, and what about their superiors? Did they violate a law? Will the law reach them?

Sometimes laws are not black and white. Some laws are more nebulous. Take for instance the law of supply and demand, the law of survival or the law of the jungle. Once in a while some of these "natural" laws creep into our lives and even lawyers have trouble coping with them. Those of us who deal with written laws, day in and day out, are not always as good with unwritten laws. One of the natural laws most lawyers eventually face is the law of aging. Its funny how that law is intertwined with the more rule-oriented sort. It often seems the older we get, the more laws we learn, and the less certain we are about what we know. Many of us saw things more clearly when we were younger. Time has its effects.

My oldest daughter graduated from both high school and college early and headed to Ecuador to work on an eco-tourism project in the equatorial cloud forest. She met a young man there and recently brought him home. Last Sunday, I picked them up at the airport. Mariah is very tall, but Juan is taller – unusual for an Ecuadorian. They made a striking couple walking in the terminal. Mariah is fair skinned while Juan has the coloring of a South American Indian. He wore a leather hat adorned with pieces of fur, and looked like a cross between Crocodile Dundee and Davy Crockett. Juan was raised

in a little village, and had never been out of his country. This was the first time he had ever been in an airplane.

Mariah brought him home to show him America. He will be staying with us for a couple of months and doing a few odd jobs. His visa gives him the legal right to work in this country.

Monday morning, as I was leaving for court, Mariah and Juan were waving to me from the garage. As I was pulling away, I pushed the garage door remote control. She told me to close it so I pushed the remote. Juan was in the center of the garage, standing below the motor. When it turned on and yanked the garage door into motion above his head, Juan's knees buckled and he looked up in horror at the moving door as if the sky was falling. Mariah and I got a pretty good laugh out of it, and eventually Juan did too.

I returned about dinner time, to my house in Lafayette Square, which contains a couple of small ponds. I asked my wife what Juan was doing. She told me he was in the square hunting squirrels. She explained that in Ecuador squirrels are rare and considered a delicacy. Juan had rigged up a box with a string and stick holding the lid, and then baited the box with bird seed. My wife told him she was having problems with squirrels

raiding the bird seed, so she was sure the squirrels would go for it. Unfortunately, or fortunately depending on your perspective, Juan returned without dinner. The squirrels had outsmarted Juan for the moment. They had probably previously seen the box and string trick by watching my television from their perch on the telephone wires. Juan had also bought some nylon string and a fish hook, wadded up some flour and tried to fish in one of the small ponds in the square. That didn't work either. I asked him if he had another plan for the squirrels. He held up two fingers on his left hand in a V and appeared to be pulling something back with his right hand. I said, "Oh a sling shot". He smiled, and asked me if I thought people would be upset with him hunting squirrels in the square. I thought I should be diplomatic with my daughter's boyfriend so I told him that some people would be upset, but that if he trapped the squirrels, and took them away in the box, he would cause less consternation than hunting them with a sling shot. I don't know if there is such a thing as a squirrel hunting license (or what the legal limit would be), but I am guessing that hunting in the city limits might not be legal. Still, I wondered what harm there would be in bending the law to allow a country boy to feel a little more comfortable in his new environment.

My daughter is considering marrying Juan. She is weighing the legal issues and immigration requirement, which vary, depending on whether they get married in the states, Ecuador, or just stay together for a while. Then there are the non-legal issues – my issues -- a daughter marrying someone who doesn't yet speak much English, who is not accustomed to American life and who may want my daughter to spend some or even the majority of her life in a different continent. The first law I've chosen to live by is that there is nothing more important than being a father. Part of being a father is letting go. What we all want in the end is for our children to be happy. Still, the law of letting go may be the toughest of all laws to understand.

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