

Mail Boxes

By Dr. Nobody

Somehow, the biological clock never fails me, for I wake up in time to walk up the driveway with mailbox in hand and bungee it to the post. I'll tell you why, so don't ask. We live in the country, a little more than 6 miles out of town. And like most country folk, we go through a lot of mailboxes. I didn't know this, because I grew up in the city, but a favorite pastime of country lads with wheels beneath their butts, buddies in tow, a beer in one hand and a baseball bat in the other is . . . you got it, bashing mailboxes.

On a good summer night you can destroy or redesign dozens of mailboxes. And if the house is far enough off the road, as ours is, then you can successfully go to the next level of vandalism: a) blow the box up, b) pump it full of lead, c) saw the post off, d) drag the box and pole down the road, or e) perform lewd acts I don't really want to talk about. Now this is just vandalism. Country living is also proving ground for learning mail theft, which of course includes stealing a) credit cards, b) social security checks, c) bills paid with checks awaiting pick-up (you know, the red flag is up, telling everybody, you know what!), d) credit card promotions, including those from your present card companies sending you convenience checks at special interest rates for new purchases — another type of red flag for a thief, and e) everything else you can think of, including discreetly marked plain brown envelopes and small packages the size of a video, CD, or magazine.

Over the past 17 years we have lost at least a dozen mailboxes. Here, let me tell you a story or two about my experiences and what knowledge I have gained. Don't worry, I got time to tell you a quickie or two, after all, I'm self-unemployed and have lots of time on my hands.

The first time my box was bashed, I was downright angry. But I replaced it immediately with another one that lasted exactly one night. This made me furious. After all, this meant I had to get off my butt and set-up a foolproof box. But I was smart. I figured that I'd replace the metal box with a plastic one — these plastic one's can withstand bashing and pop back into shape. Besides, putting up a plastic one saved me work. A few months went by, and I was pleased as a raccoon eating my cats' food at the back door. Then one day I discovered the front lid of the box had been sheered off, nowhere to be found. Of course, I was livid: the box was flawed because the lid was hinged with plastic and could not be replaced. I rebelled by just leaving the box lidless, but of course, that was like inviting a thief to count your daily receipts.

I knew now that I had to get to work. So, I nailed a metal box to the pole stand and sealed it tightly in a one-inch plywood shell. Piece of cake — for the vandals. This was my first experience with having the post sawed off at the ground. I ground my teeth into the phone at an uninterested local mail clerk who had to bear my rage. She suggested getting a box in town at the local post office or search the internet for a vandal-proof design. I'll do anything to stay self-unemployed, so I surfed the Internet. Whoa! To my amazement, mailbox bashing is pandemic across rural America. And there are companies out to put an end to it with mailboxes of enduring quality at unbearable prices. Don't they realize I'm self-unemployed? A hundred and fifty dollars for a metal can! I don't care if it has separate out mail and in mail chambers and a front firewall with a lock not even your mother-in-law can pick. That's outrageous! But that's just the bottom end. Why, there are boxes out there several hundred dollars. One company, in fact, shows a video of a military tank running over their metal box, proven indestructible. I went for that one; I was out to prove a point: I was willing to go broke not working just to have a vandal-proof mailbox so that I would be relieved from worry in getting my latest credit card offers or plain wrapped small packages. I called the company up and proceeded to order it. The woman on the other end asked: "And where in Oregon do you live?" "How do you know I live in Oregon?" I replied, flabbergasted at her knowledge, for I was certain I had not yet given her my address. She responded, "Oh, don't worry, 80% of our business is to Oregon; what do you people do out there!?" "Uh, I don't know," I sheepishly replied, "to be honest, I'm self-unemployed." We both laughed heartily at my sincere attempt at humor. When I told her Lane County, she clicked her tongue. The freight for "The Sherman," as it was called, was half again its price, for the thing weighed in at 80 lbs and there were surcharges for shipping (I'm sure it was necessary to pay the extra health insurance premium to protect UPS drivers from hernias).

The Sherman arrived, and I managed to break an unnecessary sweat installing it on a heavy-duty post. I rationalized that no vandal or thief could ever budge it, so I saved further sweat by not planting the post in concrete, instead opting for gravel fill. Bad idea. The next day I found the whole thing missing. I tore down McBeth Rd looking for bear, in hot pursuit of the villains who, of course, had done their damage deep into the night while I lay cozily asleep. I found the thing a mile down the road, luckily, but insult to injury: the box had been jammed and jimmied with crowbars and sledgehammers, and the lock was missing.

This was when I finally got the idea of giving up. After all, I'm self-unemployed and I don't need to be tested to the extreme about my patience. I'm a reasonable man, I have a PhD, and I used to be a college professor (okay, a lowly Assistant Prof for just three years, but that's another story). So, I used my intelligence. I would buy another metal box, mount it, and lay in wait, hiding in the bushes with stones and armed with a knife. Okay, so it sounds aboriginal, but what the hell. My plan was to jump out at the passersby, pelt them with

rocks to get their attention, scare the hell out of them, and defend myself with a kitchen paring knife if they jumped out and attacked. Yeah, right, and Sasquatch lives in my woods! I waited in breathless anticipation for two whole nights (that's all I was willing to employ myself for), and every passing car got my heart pumping and my blood boiling: all three cars. That's right, only three cars passed by for the two nights! By the third night I was exhausted for lack of sleep, and I figured my problems were over. But lo! The next day the box was gone.

Now, I must tell you, I am a gentle man, slow to anger. I am patient, if not somewhat handsome in my middle age, have never had skin problems, and have never washed my cotton grocery bags I bought at Safeway 15 years ago on Earth Day (much to every clerk's horror). But I had reached the end of my rope. I went searching for a used Green Beret in every thrift store up and down I-5. I was determined to catch those vile mailbox vandals. I sat down at my computer and tapped in a search for mailbox vandalism to get support in chat rooms from what I was sure were comrades plotting daring surprise catches of vandals in the middle of the night. The results were sobering. Fact is, you cannot take matters into your own hands; that's the law! You can videotape the act and use it as evidence (you know, like videotaping someone throwing litter out of the car in front of you), but no one has ever done so, at least in proving that they did so in a court of law. Furthermore, there are cases in which owners have booby-trapped their boxes to catch or mark a crook (somebody, for example, rigged a box with nails that sprung out when the lid was opened). And in every case, the crook filed suit and won big time money for being injured! One guy even caught a vandal/thief red-handed and beat him up with his own bat — wham, into prison the owner went! So, my hands were tied. I was beat twice: by the vandals/thieves and by the legal system. And I was too self-unemployed to spend the money for a video system at the head of my driveway, or to conduct an extended bivouac in the bushes just to play Tarzan.

This time I really decided to give up. And that brings me to my morning walk courtesy of my biological clock. I simply walk my five dollar plastic mail box the 800 feet to the head of the driveway, bungee it to the post, walk back down to the house for an hour or two, then walk back up to get the box and mail. Been doing this for years, no problem, and it gives me well over half a mile of exercise. After all, what else should I do? I am self-unemployed with time on my hands and feet. I am Dr. Nobody.

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