

Over the Back Fence
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Furry roundup
By Alva Wood

In River City, the citizens are up in arms against exterminating rabbits that have gone wild. In Penticton, marmots have had a population explosion. In our village, we have guinea pigs.

It started with Cynthia Hiebert's Grade 2 class, back when she was still a teacher. As a class project, her students got a pair of guinea pigs.

The Grade 2 class learned about caring for animals. They also learned about sex and reproduction, because the guinea pigs soon had little guinea pigs. No one had the heart to strangle the babies, squish them, or flush them down the toilet.

So the class got guinea pigs to take home.

The inevitable happened. Some guinea pigs escaped.

As their populations grew, they proliferated into gardens. They're terminally cute, with furry little bodies and beady eyes and wiffly noses. But they ate new lettuce leaves and nibbled the tops off carrots.

Village council, not to be outdone by River City, declared a guinea pig pandemic. Council requested tenders from pest extermination firms.

Several River City firms submitted bids. All were going to cost thousands of dollars. But a local firm called GTLB Inc. offered to get rid of the guinea pigs for free. Not only that, they'd throw in a community party, with children's games and a pellet gun shooting gallery.

By this time, Dunc McMahon had learned what "recuse" meant. So he recused himself from the debate. He and Rigger Moortice had founded GTLB Inc., he admitted.

Even with councillors' normal wariness about anything involving Rigger, it was too good an offer to turn down.

Bleeding-heart animal lovers picketed the village council offices. They just felt sick, they said, about poisoning the poor little creatures. Guinea pigs should be humanely trapped and relocated to an environment where they could live out their lives as nature intended.

But Dunc explained that they would not use poison at all. They would organize a mass guinea pig roundup, and then truck the surviving guinea pigs out to the valley grasslands and set them free.

It seemed like an acceptable solution.

Until the roundup started.

Rigger and Dunc invited their motorcycling buddies up from River City. A brigade of Harley Davidsons and equally noisy ATVs formed a ring around the village. They all started their engines at once.

The ring tightened.

The bikers paid Roger Ramcharan and John Smith and the rest of the younger kids to storm through back yards, whacking sheds, beating grass, banging on abandoned cars.

Guinea pigs fled in furry waves through the streets. The Pied Piper of Hamelin would have been jealous.

As the flood of squealing guinea pigs neared the centre of the village, Dunc and Rigger opened the gates of a wire-mesh corral.

"Now let's party!" they proclaimed.

The Ladies' Aid sold iced tea and lemonade. The bikers brought their own beer and hard lemonade. Erma Thompson peddled trays of donuts. For two dollars apiece, the bikers gave kids rides on the back of their motorcycles. There were old-fashioned egg-and-spoon races, sack races, three-legged races. And a tug-of-war that the burly bikers won easily.

Rigger and Dunc opened their shooting gallery. "Five dollars a ticket!" their sign announced.

The kids lined up in droves. Along with lots of fathers.

"What are they shooting at?" Yvonne Wentz wondered.

"Guinea pigs, of course," says Rigger. "We open up this trapdoor here," he explains. "The guinea pigs scamper through this runway," he says, "towards the cage in that truck over there. The ones that make it," he says, "get taken to the grasslands and set free."

“What about the ones that don’t make it?” Yvonne asks.

“Survival of the fittest,” shrugs Rigger. “If they can run fast enough not to get shot, they’re more likely to escape the owls and coyotes.”

It took only minutes for the protest placards to come out again.

After the ruckus died down, and the guinea pigs had all been safely delivered to their Promised Land, mayor Jake Bowers turns to Dunc.

“By the way,” Jake asks, “what did the letters GTLB stand for?”

“Oh, that,” says Dunc. “Get the little buggers.”