

RACCOONS ON THE LOOSE

If you want to prepare a raccoon before cooking it, consult the 1970s edition of *Joy of Cooking*, which says "remove all fat, inside and out," and then soak it in saltwater overnight in the refrigerator. But a more likely conundrum in Eugene these days might be: What if one bites you without being provoked?

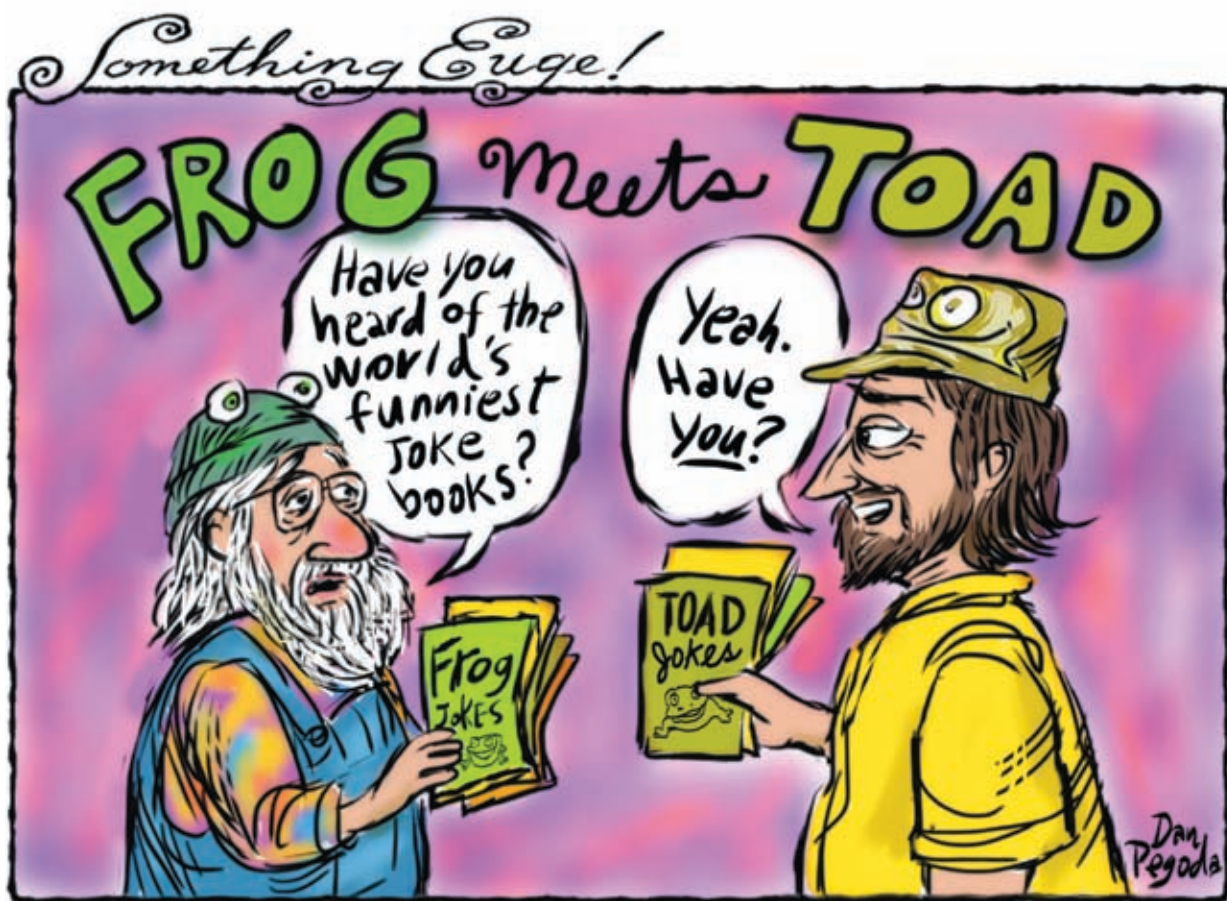
On July 16, Zondie Zinke and her partner Otis Haschemeyer were enjoying a nighttime stroll with their two young children and dog when multiple raccoons came out of the hedge and became very aggressive, scratching Zinke and going after Haschemeyer. Both of them were bit at least once, she says.

Although they had a dog with them and they were near garbage cans, the aggression didn't seem warranted. "I immediately thought rabies," she says. The couple cleaned their wounds and sought out their medical provider. They were told by their physician that it wouldn't be necessary to get rabies shots because of the unlikelihood of the raccoons they encountered carrying the disease.

According to a 2010 Oregon Department of Health report, bats are the most common carrier of rabies in the state, with an estimated 10 percent of the population infected. Although raccoons like any mammal can carry the disease, they are not often considered likely candidates. "Raccoon is not one I think of as being common with rabies," says Brian Wolfer, a wildlife biologist for Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife.

But Zinke wasn't reassured by her doctor. She did some internet research and found cases in some states where even though rabies hadn't shown up in raccoons for nearly 50 years, someone had contracted it from one recently.

Zinke and her partner went back and got the rabies shots. The doctor's hesitance to administer them was off-putting, she says. She believes it was much more difficult than it should have been for them to be treated, especially since if untreated, a person can die of the disease.



Lane County does not currently provide wildlife control services. In order for the raccoon(s) that bit Zinke and her partner to be confirmed carriers they would have to be caught and tested. Wolfer says that the raccoon would have to be caught right away to make sure it was the right one.

How the raccoon would be caught is a little unclear. The Lane County website suggests trapping it in a box and calling a service provider like ODFW, listed on the site. Live traps are available at many feed and home stores. According to Patrick Luedtke, Public Health Officer for Lane County Health and Human Services, calling the Communicable

Disease Division of Oregon Department of Public Health might be a good step forward in finding out whether a bite might be from a rabies carrier.

— Ted Shorack

LIGHTEN UP

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BY RAFAEL ALDAVE

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