



Small Worlds Around Us

By Lynn M. Watkins

Meet the Skunk Family— And See How They Fared

The headlights picked up a moving shape in the road ahead. I slowed, flicked on the high beams. There in the brilliant light was the entire "Flower" family, out for a walk.

I parked off the highway and approached them on foot. The harvest moon was so bright that mama skunk and her five children were plainly visible. She was now looking into the brighter lights of the car.

Deciding the car was quiet, she stepped daintily off the highway, her family following in single file. Immediately I named them. She was Flower; the children were Petunia, Rose, Violet, Lily and Carnation—an entire garden of fragrance.

As I watched, she stopped and started to dig in a rotted log. The children gathered around, ready to pounce on any beetle, worm or bug that was uncovered. Flower dug out a large beetle; the children fell over one another in the excitement.

Barking Dog

Suddenly she stopped digging, raised her tail like a plume, and listened. The youngsters froze in their play; they had all heard something.

Faintly and far away I heard the barking of a dog. Flower did not wait; she decided on a course of action. The best I could do was watch the little procession disappear, then hurry to the spot where I had last seen them, and look again. That way I followed their flight. Mama skunk knew where she was going. An old house stood in the pine woods. The windows were gone, the door missing, and the roof was broken and sagged. It looked eerie in the moonlight. Through a hole in the crumbling wall went the entire Flower family. Approaching the old house, I swept the sand clean in front of all the openings.

The following day I returned. There was not a single track to indicate the family had departed. With a flashlight I probed the cobwebby darkness under the sagging floor. Changing my position several times, I located the family squatting in a far corner, wondering what the bright light was all about. Satisfied they would come out soon, I blocked all the holes except one. There I set up a camera equipped with an automatic shutter. I placed a string over which mama skunk would trip when she came out.

Hadn't Come Out

But the next day when I arrived, the camera still stupidly waited; it had not been tripped. The Flower family had not left, they were all

still under the house. I could see mama skunk softly nudging each little one in turn. To her each was very dear; each one smelled good. Papa skunk had long since departed. For him the "wedding bells" had not "broken up that old gang" of his.

As I watched her under the flashlight's beam, she seemed to know that her aloof manner and haughty bearing impressed all she met, and they always gave way to her like commoners when the queen appears. Even the children sensed their own importance, for they all marched around with their tails and heads held high, like banners flying. They remained under the old house for many days. It had become home to them and later I found out why—they had there a plentiful supply of food. Mama skunk was teaching her children how to dig out and eat the millions of termites that were reducing the old house to rubble. The Flower family had smelled out a bonanza.

(Released by The Register and Tribune Syndicate, 1959)

Tips for Safe Tree Lights Given

Salem - Chief Electrical Inspector W. R. Volhwey of the state bureau of labor has recommended five basic rules to follow to help eliminate Christmas tree and other electrical accidents this season.

He noted that each Christmas there are numerous accidents from careless use of the 100 million electric Christmas tree bulbs sold in America each year.

Among his recommendations are:

1. Buy only lighting sets with a laboratory approved label. This is the assurance that certain safety standards have been met in manufacturing.

2. Check the insulation on old sets before using. He said even the best materials do not last indefinitely.

3. Do not renew bulbs with those that have too long bases exposing metal parts to contact with tree or ornaments.

4. Do not leave children at home unattended with a lighted Christmas tree.

5. Never use indoor lighting sets outside in the weather. He said the use of such sets around moisture is flirting with death.

Inspectors also advise that electrical toys require more care than other toys for safety's sake, and warned against using electric train tracks near cotton of inflammable type.



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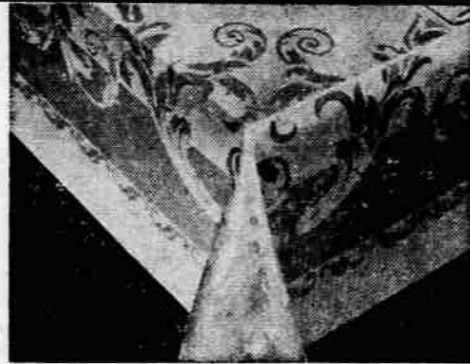
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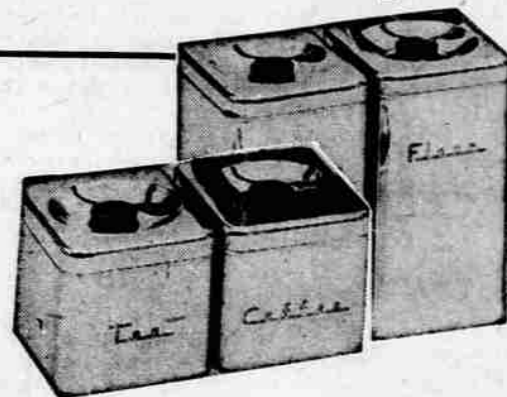
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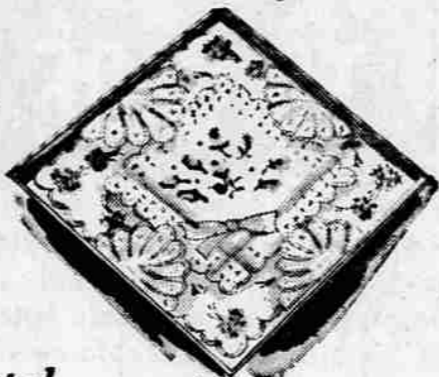
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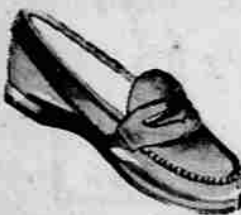
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