

Ah, Odors of Northern Michigan

I was fortunate to be able to build a modest house following a divorce in 1984 that left me and my two children, Barbara and John, with limited financial resources. With few options, I was thrilled we could continue to live in our Hathaway Springs neighborhood in Harbor Springs, Michigan, due to the generosity of the owner offering his last available lot for our new home..

During the summer of that year, just after moving into our new abode, we inherited Alex, a lovable golden retriever. Alex was the sweetest, friendliest pup anyone could hope for. Alex loved her new home with us that allowed her to roam free. Our neighborhood with large lots was pet-friendly and dogs were free to wander, romp around the woods, and visit one another.

The kids and I settled in our modest home after a hectic summer. It was a crazy-busy autumn morning when I prepared for an overnight stay in Lansing for a monthly state-wide meeting of state directors. I was a main presenter and had much on my mind.

It was early morning and I was packing for the four-hour drive and overnight trip. Alex let me know she needed to go outside to conduct her business. I opened the slider door overlooking our treed-backyard and took in several deep breaths of the clean, woodsy odors that permeated the fresh air around our home. I loved the cool fall temperatures of the north. Alex took off in a wild manner and I knew it would be fifteen or twenty minutes before she returned. I continued tasks at hand preparing for my short trip when I heard Alex's bark, signaling her unexpected and quick return.

Our pup greeted me with tail between her legs and a pungent odor that was, believe it or not, difficult to identify. It was highly offensive and something that needed to be dealt with post haste. "John, you better get up; I need your help."

“What’s going on, mom?” He sleepily came down the hall from his bedroom, screeching,
“What is that smell?”

“Alex got into something and I am in a rush. Would you please take her in the shower and give her a good shampoo? Thanks, John ... I have a busy day ahead.”

“Come on, girl... you smell terrible.” Off they went to the main shower to shampoo away the smell.

And, off I went.

Returning from my brief trip the next day, our entire house had faint remnants of a skunk odor. In our attempt to return our household to normal, the kids and I tried the tomato juice bath with limited success. Let’s just say there are better solutions today for dealing with unacceptable odors. The lingering smell seemed to be a cloud over our household and us for the next few days. Eventually, the odor subsided and, as we told our story to friends, they shared similar events that were common in our area of Michigan.

A Look Back ... Of course, John and Barbara provide variations of the story, mostly humorous, of my leaving them by themselves for the day when friendly and curious Alex confronted a startled skunk. Family history can be intriguing.