

## 6-22-18 Befuddling, Bothersome and Bull!

While last week I spoke of being befuddled by beaver laws, it never ceases to amaze me the degree to which people can be so befuddling, and on purpose!

I was reminded of my uncle Fred, my mother's only brother. He was very funny, in a dry sort of way. As a young girl, I did not always get his humor, unless he was in-person; then, the twinkle in his eye told me he was joking. However, when he wrote to me that he heard I had been throwing around the bull, I could only take it literally, having been born in Texas. I was six years old and had no idea what his letter was talking about.

When people try to bull me now, I think of Fred. These people, though, are not funny. I am not talking about bemusing either. That would be welcomed, compared to being lied to, mislead and even risking my health for their sake, when they knew all along they were misleading me and wasting my time.

These bothersome characters who lie do so because they hope to gain something. It can happen in any situation but seems to happen most often in rental situations. The babbling and the bragging can beam forth from the mouths of owner and tenant alike. Both can play this bothersome game.

The game usually begins with a call to the office. It is amazing how believable they can be! Once, a woman called to tell us about the four hundred chickens that were not being properly cared for. The coop was falling apart. There were so many, the owners could not keep track of them or feed them. The yard was full of feathers and blood from all the coyote attacks. It sounded very serious. So, I went there as a team, with the Animal Control Officer and the Animal Inspector.

There were four chickens. Yup, four. Yes, the coop was homemade and a bit ramshackle. The enclosed part was the size of a rabbit hutch. Owner was advised to patch the open areas, so the chickens could be safe at night.

What did the caller hope to gain? She hoped to get the owner in some sort of trouble. Well, that did not happen. Why did she hope for that? She wanted revenge because she had been allowed to live there for a while but had been told to leave. Ah, ha!

Getting the other side of the story is critical.

They start off bold as brass and they are not bashful in their telling of their woeful but befuddling tale. They even pretend they are the beneficent one, not wanting to bother me, and not wanting anyone to get in trouble but they just can't take it any longer! No one should have to live like this!

So, off I go to inspect the home, as the code dictates. I quickly developed a headache from the moldy cellar. I tell the tenant that rubbish and garbage can't be kept in bags out in the driveway. She claimed that was just from recently, due to illness. Then I saw the burn pile with

take-out containers and cans on a large pile of ash. It was clearly a rubbish burn area. I explained this was not allowed and if caught burning that kind of stuff, the Fire Chief would be very upset. “Oh, she had no idea”, she claimed.

Back at the office, writing the Order to Correct began. While writing it, I could not help but wonder how the water got into the cellar, as this house sits high on a hill with good drainage. In the basement I had seen streaks coming down the walls in the corner, indicating water went over the foundation but this house would not be prone to a flood. I could not stay there long enough to investigate this, though, as my sensitivity to mold ordered me to get out.

It can be useful to speak to people before I send an Order to Correct. In this case, it was very useful.

The stains in the cellar were from when the downspout extensions had been removed (or somehow fell off) and the rain water was delivered to the corners of the foundation.

The pipes in the garage had burst when the tenant left the garage door open for the chickens. Tenant was told to keep the chickens outdoors and keep the garage doors closed in the winter.

Everything I wondered about during the inspection was not only explained to me by the owner but also existed in writing. They were all listed in a court document. The tenant had excluded that part of the saga.

The tenant also, somehow, purged the fact that she had been served a forty-eight-hour eviction notice by the sheriff’s office two hours before I went there.

My Order to Correct will be modified to document the court case and eviction. I made it clear to the owner that the house could not be rented until I inspected again. I am told it is their plan to clean it up and sell it.

I can appreciate their lost desire for renting. I can’t be bashful about this, for it is part of my job but I can’t help but be befuddled sometimes, especially the throwing about the bull part!

*Cathleen Drinan is the health agent for Halifax. You can contact her at 781 293 6768 or [crinan@town.halifax.ma.us](mailto:crinan@town.halifax.ma.us)*