

## **Squirrels Vs. Blue Jays**

### **A Story for All Ages**

When I was little, my sisters and I used to spend part of every summer with my Grandpa John and my Grandma Lillian. They lived in a little cabin way up in the San Bernadino Hills, sort of by where De Benneville Pines is.

They were Seventh Day Adventists, which is one of the many flavors of Christianity. Seventh Day Adventists go to church on Saturdays, the way we do on Sundays. Anyway, Saturdays were a big deal for my grandparents. They had all sorts of rules on Saturdays, which they called the Sabbath that seemed pretty weird to us kids. For example, they didn't use their cars on Saturdays or cook any food – which we thought was pretty cool because that meant we got to eat peanut butter and jelly sandwiches and all the meals were like a picnic. But no amount of peanut butter and jelly sandwiches could make up for the worst rules of them all – NO TV on Saturdays! So no Saturday morning cartoons, no nothing.

My sisters and I loved to watch TV, so we didn't like that rule ne little bit. We argued and complained and even tried to secretly watch the TV when we thought no one was paying attention, but my grandma had eyes like X-rays and she caught us every single time. We couldn't figure out why we needed to follow all those rules in the first place. It was confusing, and, at least at first – boring.

But one day my sisters and I were sitting outside on the big back porch overlooking the back yard. The back yard was huge and totally overgrown like a jungle with a small creek running right through it. There were big trees all over the place and, the more we looked, we more little critters we noticed living back there. There were lizards and muskrats and bunnies and mice and raccoons and birds of all shapes and sizes. But most of all there were squirrels and there were blue jays. And they were at war!

You see, Grandma Lillian hung bird feeders all over the place in the branches of all those tall old trees. The blue jays were especially greedy birds and loved to chase away all the smaller birds so they could hog all the birdseed for themselves – but they forgot one important thing – the squirrels liked the birdseed too and they were even bigger than the blue jays!

So we sat on that back porch and watched the greedy squirrels race along the top of the cabin and leap all the way to the birdfeeders chasing away the blue jays in a flurry of squeaky squirrely war-cries and bushy tails. And then, just as the squirrels were settling down to enjoy their ill-gotten gains, a whole squadron of blue jays would come dive bombing in fry way up in the sky squawking and whistling and chattering fiercely. And the squirrels would dodge aside, scattered like bowling pins and the blue jays would go back to eating.

And so it continued all day long. My grandparents came out and sat with us and we all started naming all the various Blue Jays and Squirrels

and making up elaborate stories about them. “There goes old Silver Tail on another sneak attack!” Or “I think Grandpa Blue Jay is getting fat, he won’t be able to fly at all if he keeps eating so much.” We even made a map of the backyard detailing where we imagined all the animals lived and how they fought over their jungle-like turf.

One day my grandpa who had been an actor when he was young, started a new game. He pretended to be a grumpy old German man named Heinrich Schnibble who was always getting himself in trouble. We made up lots of stories about how Herr Schnibble was always trying to get rid of the blue jays and squirrels from his back yard. My sisters and I would make up parts too, sometimes pretending to be animals and then we would all act out the story like a little back yard play while my grandma would bring us lemonade and laugh until tears sprang from her eyes. In our stories, the animals always won and Herr Schnibble would always end up shaking his fist helplessly as the blue jays and squirrels kept pelting him with acorns or stealing his sandwiches and playing all kinds of other funny pranks on him.

That’s how my sisters and I finally understood why we had all those rules on Saturdays. The reason my grandparents didn’t cook or clean or run errands or let us watch TV was because for them, the Sabbath was all about family – it was all about us. From the time we got up on Saturday morning to the time we went to bed at night, we kids had our grandparents all to ourselves and they had us. If we had been watching cartoons I don’t know if we ever would have noticed the war between

the squirrels and blue jays – and we definitely would never have met Herr Schnibble.

So my wish for you today, my little sisters and brothers, is that you can find your own special time with your parents and grandparents – time that is set apart just for you to have fun and be a family.

Amen.