



I Am A Conservationist

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My fiancée, Tammy, is concerned about my health. Apparently high blood pressure runs in my family; my salt intake is egregious; I spurn the lotions and sunblocks that, she swears, would in some way ward off the numerous skin diseases or "friends," as I call them, that I have been cultivating on certain aspects of my body for longer than I have even known my Tammy.

That's pretty much always the problem: the new girlfriend, or fiancée, or whatever, comes in and suddenly your old friends are "disgusting." And naturally nothing is ever good enough. Having reluctantly given in to the anti-fungal ointment she insists I use to euthanize what I lovingly refer to as my "gimp toenail," I am now subject to even more furtive entreaties to trim said toenail. So that, as she says, it does not cut my other toes. And give me some sort of gimp infection.

Whatever.

None of this, however, is what has been causing so much distress in our cozy lifestyle. The new issue is beverages.

Specifically one beverage. Neither Vodka nor Rum. Tammy, who has always been the wilder of our pair, has no problem with my abiding love for the classic Victor Bergeron Mai Tai.

No. Let us, for clarity's sake, label the unfortunate beverage as "Snapple." Yes? And the flavor of this so-called "Snapple" we could specify as "Go-Bananas Yellow with the Monkey Proof lid."

What is the crime of this poor, unassuming nectar? Certainly not the taste, so reminiscent of a Now And Later taffee chew! Certainly not. Nor does Tammy dislike our simian brethren. What crime, then, could any beverage be accused of?

The crime of sitting in the cupholder of my car. That is all. Tammy, with her coffees and chai teas and shampoo bottles, resents that any bottle of mine, containing nectar however sweet, should impinge upon the manifest destiny of her containers. That has to be it.

And maybe that the half-empty bottle has lived in my car for over nine months. Give or take a month. Through the chills of a winter, through the oven-like heat of a southern California summer, through road-trips and graduations and new jobs in new towns, through speeds great and small, accidents minor and major, that Banana Snapple has stayed with us, stood by our sides, protected us from thirst and emptiness.

And now Tammy has the nerve, the gall, to tell me that this honorable beverage is a "health hazard."

It's not that I ever still drink from this bottle. Heavens no. God no. I'm relatively certain that, by this point, drinking would be a near-impossibility. The larger part of the contained Snapple, or ex-Snapple, has collected into clumps of yellow-brown solid matter that make dull noises when they connect with the sides of the glass. I'm not making this up.

This is true. Although enough liquid remains to allow for movement and comfort, the majority of the once half-empty bottle is now filled with these dark massive shapes. I'm pretty sure that in some states removing them from their container would constitute a third-trimester abortion and would be punishable by jail time.

So like I say, drinking is pretty much out of the question. Eating, maybe. I'll give you eating. But first you'd have to get the clumps out of the bottle. And I don't think that's happening any time soon. The point being that if I can't eat or drink my erstwhile Snapple, then it can't possibly do me any harm.

Nevertheless, Tammy says, that thing is a health hazard.

And I tell her, don't call it a "thing." It has feelings too.

What brought this all on was, a few weeks ago, I decided it would be best for all involved if my automobile were to undergo a trifle of elective surgery. For too many years I have traveled subjected to the sounds of an outdated stereo system. So, some three weeks ago, I took my car to the local mom-and-pop hi-fi megastore and asked the mechanic to install a top-of-the-line compact-disk changer. Which was fine. However, when said mechanic drove my car around to detail the more pertinent aspects of the project, he pulled up to me, opened the car door, and said, with a stunned smile, "Does this happen often?"

In his raised right hand was the key to my car. Attached to the key was the entire ignition shaft of my car. Which of course was disattached from the rest of the automobile.

"No," I said. "No, I don't think that happens very often."

The mechanic reattached the part skillfully, but suggested that I return my automobile to the shop from whence it came, in order that a more permanent repair be made.

Naturally I was of two minds. On the one hand, the part had been returned to its rightful place already. I had watched the mechanic himself slide it back into its hole seconds after removing it.

On the other hand, I had already had that part fixed twice in the past year. So naturally this time it would be free.

Which it was, I discovered when I talked to my Ford Service Representative, Anita.

And through it all, the Go Bananas Snapple remained in the coveted front left cupholder, easily within reach of my shifting hand. But the evening before taking my car to Ford, I thought better of myself and took the bottle out of its place. We had just returned from dinner, and Tammy noticed my actions as we crossed the parking lot to our apartment.

"What are you doing?" she asked.

"I'm taking the Snapple inside," I said. "You know mechanics steal things all the time."

To which she replied, "I don't want that thing in the house."

"But I can't leave it in the car!"

Tammy refused to listen to reason. "I don't want that thing anywhere near our cats. Take it to the dumpster."

"But it's the last of its kind! I haven't seen any others for like six months! If I put it into the dumpster, what will become of the noble breed of Banana Snapple?"

Tammy just walked away.

So I snuck back to the car and replaced my friend in his rightful place. And fortunately for all involved, he was not abducted by the mechanics at the Ford Dealership.

Tammy's point is this: apparently, capped or uncapped, my vintage Go Bananas Snapple is most likely producing fumes. And apparently, capped or uncapped, these fumes are most likely escaping the bottle even now and contributing to my ill health. Every time I enter my car, I could be inhaling the fruit drink equivalent of the sarin gas that killed so many conscientious Japanese businessmen. I am the sweet thirst-quenching equivalent of a bioterrorist.

But I cannot get rid of my lovely bottle. I cannot. Tammy does not understand these things--the love a man feels for his congealed lump of chemicals and microscopic organisms gone awry. I have never been a part of such vital creation. And every time I walk that bottle to the dumpster, the largest of the clumps looks out at me with its one fully-formed eye, and I start to think of the future: of its first word, its first step, of that day when it outgrows its bottle and walks out into the world.

I'm not just endangering my health. I'm saving the last of a noble race.