

Last summer, we installed a cat door for our beloved feline family member, Frodo. It's a simple contraption, really – just a semi-transparent flap attached to the top of a small square hole sliced into our back door by my industrious hubby, held together with some hardware thingamajigs. You know – a Lowe's kit.



It took Frodo a few days to learn to use his special door. He was timid at first – or maybe just confused – but my daughter “trained” him, tossing cat food through the door while he looked on, then shoving him through, headfirst, in pursuit of the snack. After a few rounds of this, Frodo began tentatively pushing himself through the door without help; then, before we knew it, he was traipsing in and out of our house like he owned the joint.

Those first few months were heady times! Frodo was free to come and go as he pleased, frolicking at will in our back yard, chasing butterflies, birds – and his tail – as cats were meant to do. No more scratching sounds at the back door during *American Idol*. No middle-of-the-night meowing to go out. We could leave Frodo home alone overnight, and return to find – oh wonder of wonders! – a still-empty litter box and sweet-smelling house. It was bliss! We were happier, Frodo was happier. Everything was good.

Then, the trouble began. Frodo started bringing *creatures* in through his door. Initially, it was a couple of tiny snakes. The first was dead, but live ones followed. (Live snakes. In our house.) Next, it was a small, fluffy, squirmy beast that Jeff and I determined must be a mole. (Have you ever actually *seen* a mole? Weird.)

Then, one day when I was home alone, sitting at my computer near the back door, Frodo leapt through his kitty hole with an entire squirrel in his mouth. The squirrel *seemed*

dead – it was motionless – but it was whole, and wholly unscathed. Live, dead, whatever. It was a squirrel. I panicked as Frodo ran toward the back of the house. I grabbed the broom and dust pan, and went stomping after him yelling, “Frodo, no! NO! Noooooooooo!” Frodo turned, stood there looking at me, squirrel hanging from his mouth, then dropped it gingerly at my feet. He gazed up at me with his big green eyes, as if to say, “Here, look what I’ve slain for you, m’lady.”

I wasn’t charmed. I was appalled. I frantically swept the limp, freakishly unmarred squirrel into the dust pan and tossed it out the door, screaming bloody murder the whole time. I turned to Frodo, again, and yelled “Nooooooooooooo Frodooooo!” He looked at me, turned, and shimmied out the cat door.

After that, it was birds. Three, to be exact. Two, already half-eaten. One, apparently wrangled into submission under our marriage bed (there were telltale feathers!), then dragged into the kitchen and consumed under the table. (All that remained was a red cardinal head. Appetizing.) Each time it happened, I grabbed my broom, waved it in the air like a mad woman, roared Noooooo Frodoooooooo, and let all hell rain down. Each time, he looked at me, turned, and shimmied out the cat door.

Are cats trainable? I have no idea. All I do know is that we haven’t had an “incident” in a pretty good while now. Not since I started wielding my broom like a machete and screaming like crazy. Before that, we’d decided we might have to keep the cat door locked most of the time, but maybe that won’t be necessary. Maybe Frodo has learned he has to keep his *animal* appetites under control if he wants to hang with the humans.

I was reminded of Frodo and his cat door the other day while reading about that Yale student,

Aliza Shvartz, and her grisly “art” project. (Bear with me; I’ll twist this analogy ‘til it works!) In case you missed this truly bizarre story, here’s what we first learned, from the *Yale Daily News*:

“Beginning next Tuesday, Shvarts will be displaying her senior art project, a documentation of a nine-month process during which she artificially inseminated herself ‘as often as possible’ while periodically taking abortifacient drugs to induce miscarriages. Her exhibition will feature video recordings of these forced miscarriages as well as preserved collections of the blood from the process. The goal in creating the art exhibition, Shvarts said, was to spark conversation and debate on the relationship between art and the human body. “

Not surprisingly, the blogosphere went wild. The next day, though, Yale was telling a different story. Again, from the *Daily News*:

“Aliza Shvarts ’08 was never impregnated. She never miscarried. The sweeping outrage on blogs across the country was apparently for naught — at least according to the University...

“‘The entire project is an art piece, a creative fiction designed to draw attention to the ambiguity surrounding form and function of a woman’s body,’ Yale spokeswoman Helaine Klasky said in a written statement Thursday afternoon.

“Klasky continued, saying, ‘She is an artist and has the right to express herself through performance art.’”

Well, yes. She certainly *does* have that right. We have freedom of speech in this country, thank God, along with all sorts of other freedom. Our founding fathers, and many who came after, fought for that freedom with blood, sweat, and plenty of tears. I am so often mortified, lately, by how we choose to repay them.

Sometimes, we enlightened, postmodern Americans seem like cats abusing our kitty door, using our *freedom* as an excuse to act like, well, *animals*. All you have to do is turn on the latest episode of reality TV, open the latest issue of

Cosmopolitan

– or the

Yale Daily News

– to see what I mean. It’s “Americans Gone Wild” out there. As long as you’re remembering to recycle, anything else pretty much goes.

Pope Benedict, in his eloquent speech in Washington last week, said “freedom is not only a gift, but a summons to personal responsibility”... that a “democracy without values can lose its very soul.” This most America-loving pontiff even quoted our own George Washington, who believed that religion and morality represented “indispensable supports” of political prosperity.

Of course, Washington couldn’t have guessed that, only a couple of centuries later, religion would be deemed *perfectly* dispensable, and morality, “all relative.” He couldn’t have imagined that our most prestigious institutions of higher learning would begin marginalizing the classical Western canon to serve the vague requirements of multiculturalism, that many of our artists would cease to pursue timeless truth and beauty in favor of trendy shock and statement, that the line between gender roles would be all but obliterated in the name of “progress,” and that “family values” would become a term of mockery. Washington could not possibly have predicted that, in the noble pursuit of tolerance and equality, we would all but reject our Judeo-Christian inheritance – once understood to be the very foundation of those concepts – leaving whole generations culturally rootless and with no moral context beyond “whatever feels right to me right now.”

Is it any wonder we’re churning out young people like Aliza Shvartz, who, much like my little cat Frodo with his squirrel, probably thought she was being very clever and pleasing when she

dumped this “art” project at the feet of her university?

The most upsetting part of the story, to me, was the namby-pamby response of the Yale spokesperson, with her mumbo-jumbo about Svartz’s project being “a creative fiction designed to draw attention to the ambiguity surrounding form and function of a woman’s body.” Svartz, herself, disputes the “fiction” part – says she really *did* inseminate herself – but who cares? Either way, the project is ill-conceived, depraved, and just plain wrong. No amount of postmodern gobbledygook about ambiguity, form, and function can disguise that fact.

Yuval Levin at *NRO* sums it up well: “If it’s a hoax, it’s an abhorrent and disgusting one. If it turns out to be true, it’s of course all the more so and far worse. Either way, where are the adults at Yale?”

Good question. And Yale’s certainly not the only adult-free zone around.

Our founding fathers – adults, all – never saw freedom as end in itself – just a pass to party hardy and chase our tails – but as a means by which we might become our highest, truest, *best* selves. They saw it as a gift from our Creator, and, as the pope recently expressed, a gift that brings responsibility. That responsibility includes making moral judgments. Some of those judgment calls, you’ll say, are –

I know

– ambiguous. That may be. But some should be quite easy to make. (See Yale, above.) It’s not always fun, it’s not always cool, and it often makes us unpopular... but sometimes, in a free society, we grown-ups have to pick up our brooms, wave them in the air, and scream
Nooooooooo!

Otherwise, we have no right to be dismayed by what the cat drags in.