



Ah! Chateau Negative Cash Flow. Has a certain ring to it, doesn't it? Since you've had a month or so to mull over the name and conjure up all sorts of visions in your fertile little minds, let me not prolong this any further. Chateau Negative Cash Flow (which will be simplified evermore for both of us as simply CNCF) is, according to my sister-in-law, Toni, (an authority on such matters) a Gothic Revival Victorian, circa 1913. It is very large, very white, has a massive wrap around front porch, TH-sized rooms (except for the kitchen that was designed for munchkins) and circa 1913 plumbing. But, aside from all that, what it has the most of is - potential!

"Hmm", you are saying to yourselves, "sounds like an unwieldy version of the MASS." And to that I respond that it does need some work ("some" being a relative term in this case.) It needs some of about everything the home improvement industry has to offer! And, it needs considerably less of what Mother Nature has to offer.

Now, I'd like to preface the following remarks with a disclaimer. In all the things I read about house-hunting and with all the conversations I have had with a myriad of people, the topic of wildlife never came up beyond the mortgage holder's obsession with termites. We checked the foundation, we checked out the condition of neighboring houses as well as the condition of their current occupants, we clocked the mileage to main roads, highways, the pizza parlor, deli, video store but we failed miserably in the unanticipated pet department. As a result we were the hapless victims of THE NIGHT "THEY" TOOK OVER.

After a long and very exhausting weekend of moving, TH and I were ready for a break on Monday night. I was going to cook an actual meal to give us a break from cold pizza and warm beer, TH was going to hook up the TV and the plan was for a few hours of well earned vegetation. The plan was working great - for awhile. We ate real food, cleaned up and collapsed in front of the boob tube only to be assaulted by an evening of reruns and meaningless network drivel. While TH aerobically exercised his index finger on the remote I soon decided the new Hailey novel had more appeal than sitcom heaven or another episode of "Hidden Hero's". Repairing to the comfort of bed, book in hand, I cocooned myself with all the pillows and started reading.

No sooner had Mr. Hailey transported me into the fast-paced world of network news and a sinister kidnapping than a

high-pitched shrill followed immediately by two sets of ker-thumps moving off in opposite directions directly above, forced me back to the real world of mortgage payments and house restoration. I sat there trying to sort out the noise while our cat, Bullwinkle, sat staring at the ceiling - a structure, by the way, that could use some repair for stress cracks and a good coat of paint... a soft peach, I think. After several consecutive seconds of silence I passed the whole thing off as CNCF breathing and went back to my book. That theory was sorely tested a few minutes later with two sets of shrills, very impressive hissing and more ker thumps - again moving off in opposite directions directly above. This repeat performance, I concluded, demanded investigation - by TH.

Now, there are any number of techniques that a member of the female persuasion can use to get the immediate attention of a member of the male persuasion in a crisis. In this situation I determined screaming to be an over reaction since I was sure that at some point in the future it would probably be necessary and didn't want to over use it. For a fleeting moment I considered running downstairs babbling incomprehensively about a ghost but everyone knows that no self-respecting ghost would be so obvious as to shrill like that. So, with all the melodramatic ploys found to be wanting I simply went to the head of the stairs and asked TH to come up with a flash light. He, of course, inquired why and I, losing a smidgen of composure, suggested that we were under attack!

CNCF is a three story structure, the top floor currently being the depository for all that "stuff" we haven't unpacked and found a permanent home for yet - and probably won't for months to come. It's not an attic per se because at it's highest gabled point the ceiling is 20 feet tall, but at the same time it's not a "finished" space either. Running along the entire floor line are the roof eaves and because the space is unfinished and the place is circa 1913 there are a few small deficiencies in basic building integrity. The staircase that takes you from the second to the third floor makes a perfect square right after the fifth step but at the landing you can look right into that section of the eaves. So, there went TH, holding a long handled flash light in much the same manner that Indiana Jones holds his whip,

boldly ascending the staircase to the third floor while I covered his rear flank, confidently armed with the first thing I saw that looked like a reasonable weapon - my pitching wedge!

TH got to the landing after the fifth step and swept the forward space with the flashlight. Nothing..., Not a shrill, a hiss, not one single ker-thump. He looked back at me with one of "those" looks that spoke volumes about the deteriorating state of my sanity. Then, as I was rapidly preparing my defense, the loudest shrill of all tore through the space followed immediately by ker-thumps moving ever closer from two directions. TH made the square right, quickly scanned the eaves and above the racket I heard him say, "Holy S—!" There they were eyeball to eyeball to eyeball!

Well, it seems that those small structural deficiencies I mentioned were raccoon size. Large raccoon size. About 35 pounds worth of raccoon size. And, as an added bonus, at no extra cost we had two of them. Lest we take their presence personally, the war was strictly about turf. Ironically, after they figured out their antics were being observed by a larger than raccoon species (Much Larger), they departed...hopefully from the same place they entered. We've named them George and Gorby.

The next evening TH struggled into the house with an imposing cardboard box, opened it, handed me the instruction manual with a request to find out what to bait the thing with. Since I hadn't yet seen a trout swimming in the toilet bowl I set about reading all about the Hav-a-heart Humane Animal Trapping System - good for possum, large squirrels, weasels, small foxes, baby bears (that got my attention) and, ah yes, raccoons! This thing is terrific. For fifty bucks and a dollop of peanut butter you have the rare privilege of snaring all sorts of wildlife that you too can then take "a minimum of five miles away" so they can invade somebody else.

Ah! Chateau Negative Cash Flow. It has a certain ring, and shrill and hiss and ker plunk about it, doesn't it?