

Humility, Red Convertibles and Why We're Still a Two-Lizard-Household by Wade Wingler

I have to start by telling you that my mother has a new car. This is not just any car. It's a brand new, candy apple red convertible. She's more than excited about this car. It's all she talks about. You would think that modern man just recently invented paved roads for the sole purpose of allowing Mom and her car to strike out on automotive adventures together.

So it is with a strange mix of embarrassment and hopeful anxiety that I find myself, a grown man, lying on my stomach, fifteen feet away from Mom's new convertible with ants crawling across my legs and a cobweb on my nose. Ahead of me, under our deck and just out of my reach, sits Petunia the lizard. Although this particular kind of lizard doesn't have the physical ability to smirk, upon her pebbly little face is the unmistakable expression of a juvenile delinquent that is in the process of getting the best of an adult. Without a doubt, this animal is smirking.

To my left crouches my brother-in-law, a police officer, expertly wielding a garden hose. "I think I can get a shot! Are you ready?" Responding from above is my sister, poking madly between the deck's timbers with a fishing rod. She shouts "Yes! For cryin' out loud, just squirt the darn thing!"

My mother chimes in "I've got this side covered. Go ahead and give her a squirt and let's see what happens!" Behind me is my father taking in the bedlam and, though I can't see his face from my position in the cobwebs, I'm pretty sure the grin on his face strangely resembles that of the lizard's. "Go for it!" he chortles.

Just a few hours before, I decided to invest in a nice pink kiddie pool. I had read on the Internet that bearded dragons, like Petunia, thrive in natural sunlight and being in a kiddie pool in the sunshine makes them the happiest of reptilian campers. The Internet also said to put the lizard on a leash. Unlike the kiddie pool, a leash seemed a little silly. Nowhere did this article mention a lizard's ability to suddenly jump over the edge of a pool and run under the deck, out of reach, smirking.

A few months ago, my ten-year-old daughter and I discussed the fact that my allergies prevent me from spending quality time with our family dog without ending up itchy-eyed and miserable. So, we decided that a bearded dragon would make a nice addition to our little household—enter Petunia. Things went so well with Petunia that two weeks later we brought Lola the leopard gecko home, thus promoting us to the rank of a two-lizard-household. At the time, it made perfect sense for my daughter to take on the responsibility of daily pet care and general lizard husbandry. Besides, Lola's big blinking eyes make you almost completely forget the fact that she's second cousins with snakes, crocodiles and

several other cold blooded beasts that narrowly survived extinction during the last ice age. In fact, my daughter will endlessly argue that both lizards are “cute”.

Fast forward back to the current lizard-under-the-deck scenario and it occurs to me that “cute” is not exactly the phrase that one would use to describe the reptilian smirk that disappears when the expertly-trained marksman pulls the trigger on the garden hose. “Cute” is not the phrase one would use to describe the mayhem that immediately follows. “Cute” is not even on the list of phrases that would be appropriate to describe a terrified lizard, running along the foundation of our house—SMACK!—into the corner of the deck. Nor is “cute” the right phrase to describe the strange sensation of a grown man, arm-deep in cobwebs and gravel, holding a lizard safely in place while his father uses a screw driver to remove boards from the deck allowing for a late-evening lizard extraction. “Cute” is not even the best way to describe a lizard that’s been successfully rescued, put in a warm bath to soak and treated to some fresh raspberries by its reluctant keeper who’s relieved that he won’t have to explain an escaped lizard to a ten year old little girl.

“Cute” however, is perhaps a phrase that can be used to accurately describe a candy apple red convertible being driven away by my mother as she shouts “Wade, when you get over your embarrassment and write a story about this silly lizard fiasco, make sure you end it with ‘And your Mom drove off in her new red convertible!’”