

Hunter safety is For Kids

By Andrew Smith

The worst thing about accidentally blowing your best friend's head off during a hunting trip isn't trying to find his ears in the tall grass; though that's a chore, sure enough. The worst thing is trying to tell his kid that well, these things happen, but you'll sure try and be more careful next time.

"And here, kid. I got something for you."

"What's that?"

"It's the gum your dad was chewing when I, uh, the gun went off. I found it by one of his eyebrows, and I thought he'd like for you to have it. There's still some flavor left in it, I'll bet. You like spearmint?"

"I'm not allowed to chew gum. I have braces."

"Well, maybe some of your friends chew gum. Maybe you could trade it, or something."

"I don't have any friends."

"Listen kid, you oughta lighten up a little. I've been carrying this gum around in my pocket for a month so I could give it to you. Last week it stuck all over the money I won playing cards, and I had to take a razor blade and scrape it off. You got any idea how long that took? Well, I'll tell ya. It took *hours*. Now take the gum. It was your dad's favorite kind."

"Wait a minute! My dad didn't even chew gum. He couldn't. He had braces."

"Braces! Well I'll be a brass monkey. Did he have a skull and crossbones earring in his left ear? And a snake eating an apple tattooed on his arm?"

"No. He had a crew cut."

"A crew cut! Well, that's not much help. It's hard to tell how a man's wearing his hair when he hasn't even got a head."

"He had an extra thumb on his right hand."

"Ah, an extra thumb. Well, then it wasn't him. It must've been somebody else. It must've been George. He always wore a skull and crossbones earring in his left ear, and he had a snake eating an apple tattooed on his arm. *And* he only had one thumb per hand. Yup, I'd bet anything it was George."

"You mean my dad's still alive?"

Well, I should think so. Unless something's happened."

"Then, where is he?"

“Hmm. Good question. I must’ve dropped him off at George’s house by mistake. You see we were all pretty sure that I’d shot your dad, but, honestly, without the face it was hard to tell. So, when I gave George, I mean your dad, a ride home, I naturally took him to George’s house. I just assumed that since I’d probably shot your dad, the man riding with me must be George.”

“But didn’t my dad know that he wasn’t George?”

“Well, how could he? We all agreed your dad was dead. He saw the body with his own eyes. I suppose if the head was still on it he could have said, ‘Hey, that’s not me!’ But the head wasn’t on it; and when I took him to George’s house, who else should he think he was if he wasn’t George?”

“But couldn’t you tell it was my dad just by looking at him?”

“Well, yes, I probably could have; if I had looked at him. But I didn’t. Anyway, there’s nothing we can do about it now. Sorry. And I’ll be more careful next time this happens.”

“Wait! Can’t we just go and get my dad?”

“Well we could, but then what would George’s wife do? She loves him, you know. It would break her heart if she found out George was your dad.”

“But George *is* my dad.”

“I think you’re a little young for that kind of talk. That’s a matter for the courts to decide, *after* the blood tests have been taken. And what about the man that’s raised you all these years? You ever stop and consider his feelings? Why, if any son of *mine* ever said George was his dad, I’d...”

“But my dad thinks *he* is George.”

“Yes. Well, there’s that. But who are we to tell him what to think? It’s a free country. A man’s got a right to think as he pleases. He can think he’s an elephant if he wants. It’s perfectly legal. Anyway, do you want this gum, or not?”

“If I take it, are you going to tell my mom?”

“Hey, what the women don’t know won’t hurt you and me, eh?”

“Alright. Hand it over.”

“That’s a good boy. You know, you’re growing up into quite a young man. You’re a lot like your dad. If he was still around, he’d be real proud of you.”

“You think so?”

“I know he would. Hey, I’ve got an idea. Next time the guys and I go hunting, how’d you like to tag along?”

“Can I?”

“Why sure. And you know, kid, you’re going to love it. I can just tell.”