Background check

We met at high noon, she was dressed completely in green from her pilates shoes to her forest green sweatband. She wore spandex leotards, an Audubon pin and a Sierra Club tee shirt with John Muir's face on it. The leotards and Muir's likeness were distorted by her 250 pounds of greenness. I wore jeans, boots and a free cap from an auction market. It was obvious that we were from different warring tribes.

She sneered at me and drew first as both our hands reached for the door to the ice cream novelties in the frozen food aisle of our local grocery store. I'd seen her around town ever since she and her diminutive husband moved from the big city to our little town.

I knew her only by reputation. She'd immersed herself in local politics and spent six nights a week going to meetings, and I bet her henpecked husband sure dreaded that seventh night when she stayed home. She was busy saving salamanders, watching birds through binoculars, carrying protest signs and going on sit-down strikes. And believe me, she had a considerable amount to sit down!

When she took the last box of Skinny Cow® fudge bars, I was in a fighting mood. "That's a nice T-shirt you have there," I said politely. "John Muir was quite a man."

"I"ll say," she snarled. "He saved Yosemite from being decimated by your kind."

"He was one once, you know?"

"Who?" she asked with a sour smile and a politically correct accent.

"John Muir. The founder of the Sierra Club was a sheepherder when he first came to California.

He also worked in saw mills where he stripped the beautiful trees of their branches before ripping the flesh from their bodies and turning them into lumber."

"That can't be true. He saved Yosemite."

"You may not want to believe it, but I assure you it's true. I just finished reading a book about Muir. He was an accomplished man, and besides founding the Sierra Club, he invented a wooden alarm clock that would tip you out of bed at the desired hour. But where he really made his money was as a rancher. You know, just like me."

She turned scarlet, which did not go well with her green outfit, and tried to evade me, but I followed her to paper products. I did my best impression of a chainsaw before saying, "Muir was quite a capitalist, you know? He actually invented another machine that made 2,500 broom handles a day. But I'm sure you know all this because you have his face emblazoned across your body. Just imagine, John Muir made his money herding cows so he could one day start the Sierra Club."

Again, she wheeled her cart away, and I didn't run into her again until she tried to run into me. Literally. She was in pet foods buying bird seed for her feathered friends. "I'm sure you know that John James Audubon's family in America owned a lead mine where they mined lead for bullets?" (Here I did my great impression of a Thompson machine gun!) Then I really laid it on: "Audubon was quite a hunter and fisherman, too?"

"No, he painted birds, he didn't sh-sh-shoot them," she raged at me.

"Before he painted them, he shot them from the sky. You didn't think he got such great detail by observing them through a looking glass, did you? He was also a taxidermist and created his own nature museum of a variety of dead animals that he killed."

By now I was only talking to myself as my greenie friend left her loaded cart in the store and ran outside. Too bad, too, because I also wanted to tell her that Al Gore, the father of global warming and the man who said gassy cows caused it, was the son of a cattle breeder himself,

and that Bruce Babbitt, the man who tried to run ranchers out of business, came from one of the great ranching families in America.

But I got the impression she really didn’t want to hear any more about her Gods of Green. So I took the fudge bars from her abandoned cart and rushed them home to my freezer before they began to melt. Global warming, you know?

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