

## Baird: Where there's smoke, there's fire - maybe

By Esther C. Baird/ The Baird Facts

Wednesday, November 22, 2006

This year we are hosting Thanksgiving. In 10 years of marriage we've never hosted so we are long overdue this responsibility. The upside is that we finally get to use our good china and cook in our newly remodeled kitchen. The downside is that I seem to have a close relationship with fire and food related incidents.

Actually, my fire affinity is not just limited to food.

Recently I had yet another adventure of the incendiary sort. Our house had been filling with a toxic, smoky smell over the course of a half hour or so. Obviously this concerned me. I did a check of all our outlets and our oven - a natural place to look in my case. Finding nothing, I stepped outside where the smell was much worse. Upon peering over our back fence, and across our neighbor's yard, I saw smoke rising from beyond the shrubbery.

I doubted that the girl scouts had set up camp in the hedge, so I called 911. I specified immediately that it was not my house on fire, that in fact I wasn't even sure if any house were on fire, but that something beyond the bushes was certainly burning. I clarified which street the house would be on - the one behind ours - and hung up feeling like I'd done the right thing. Almost immediately I heard distant sirens come to life and I felt satisfied that that Beverly's finest were on their way.

Moments later, my daughter woke up early from her nap and was in that sweaty, half asleep state that is endearing in children and mere bed-head in adults. I forgot about the smoke and went into mommy mode. Smoothing away the pillow lines on her face, I gently lay her down on the carpet to change her into some play clothes. As I did, the reason for the early wakeup rolled out of her pants. A little surprise package from the land of the potty-trained-except-during-deep-sleep. Suddenly there was a new noxious fume in the air. Caught off guard, I sat frozen in surprise. But a second and more unexpected event snapped me to attention. Someone, somewhere, was calling my name.

"Esther . . . is there an Esther in the house?" I stared at my daughter. Where was the voice coming from? Was I hallucinating from all the various fumes? "Is anyone home?" The voice called again.

This time, I crawled to my daughter's window and peered out. I was confused to see a fireman in full fire regalia standing on my back deck looking up at me.

I pushed the window open and yelled out. "I'm Esther, but this is the wrong house, it's that one beyond the shrubbery."

"We don't see it. We need you to come show us where you saw it."

"Uh." I stuttered.

How did a fire get lost? I quickly threw a pair of underwear on my daughter and scooped her up, while simultaneously grabbing the 'package' with a moist-towelette. Running out the front door I was instantly struck by two things. First, there was a fire truck in front of my house flashing its wild, bright lights. Secondly, a small crowd of neighbors had gathered on the sidewalk. They stared at me as I burst outside with my panty-clad daughter and a handful of excitement.

"The fire is not here." I said again weakly. "Just behind my house - didn't you see the smoke coming out of the bushes, can't you smell it?" I made a show of taking a deep breath which of course was a mistake considering what I was holding.

The fireman on my deck came around and said. "We found it, but it's already out." He looked at me, my mostly unclothed child, and my other hand, and quickly specified. "It was just a guy working on his car."

"But the car must have been on fire right? Was he OK? There was smoke and fumes . . ."

The fireman nodded, "Yeah, it was just some car-oil."

I nodded, relieved, but also suspicious that perhaps I was supposed to know that burning oil didn't smell like a burning house in my bushes.

My one neighbor smiled sympathetically. "It's always good to be safe in these situations." But as my other neighbor came out from her house, the first one said, "It's just Esther - just a false alarm. Not a fire."

It's on that note that I ponder the Thanksgiving meal and its many possible pyrotechnic implications - real or imagined. Apparently my husband has pondered that as well and has declared that he'll be grilling the turkey by himself.

For that, I think we can all be thankful.

Esther Baird is a Beverly resident. Her column appears regularly in the Citizen. If you have any suggestions or comments about The Baird Facts please contact her at: [esther@estherbaird.com](mailto:esther@estherbaird.com), or visit her Web site at [www.estherbaird.com](http://www.estherbaird.com).