



Humor in Surveying: Reversal of Fortune

Professional Surveyor Magazine - October 2004

A Work of Fiction (... but based on a true story)

I was thinking that when the dog's owner showed up, he'd want an explanation. I was wrong. He just fell over laughing. Literally. I mean the guy fell to his knees, then to his side on the ground, holding his gut. The dog didn't know what to do. It glanced at his owner; then turned back to me and growled slightly—then back to his owner. Then it decided to go over to its owner and sniff him to make sure he was okay. It whimpered a bit too, but the guy was just too overwhelmed by the sight of the dog, guarding its pen from the outside, with some guy dressed in what appeared to be tattered rags, on the inside of the pen. I was helpless of course. I wasn't about to try to exit the pen with that big Doberman out there.

I'm sure that I made quite a sight, too. I hadn't just hopped over the fence into the pen. I was lucky to have gotten into it with a minimum of blood being spilled. All it had gotten was most of my pants and one shoe. I had started out in blue jeans. Now I was wearing what probably appeared to be very tattered, blue jean cut-off shorts. And I was happy to be wearing them, too. That dog had wanted to take off both my legs, I'm sure.

I had been doing some recon work on a large boundary which abuts the back line of an old subdivision. I was on my own that day and had been enjoying hiking the boundary and finding most of the corner monuments on a beautiful spring day. It was too early in the year for poison ivy, bees, heat, humidity, and many of the other "dangers" of our profession which plague us throughout the summer months. My serenity was initially interrupted by this very same dog, a large muscular Doberman, when I approached the corner of its pen.

As usual, the lot owner had placed the dog's pen at the back corner of his lot. There's nothing at all wrong with that. In fact, it makes perfect sense. If I had a dog pen, that's probably where I'd put it, too. My problem was that the monument I was looking for was apparently located at the corner of the dog's pen. It was a monument marking an angle point of two long legs of the property I was surveying and the end of this particular line of the abutting subdivision. I wanted to find this one in particular because it would impact our workload considerably if I had to re-create the location.

I was instantly aware of this dog and of the dog's awareness of me when I approached the pen. I thought of knocking on the owner's door but there didn't appear to be anyone at home. I didn't figure I'd be there more than a couple of minutes anyway. The pen is in the lot corner and often these monuments are obvious and easy to find. I thought I'd just quietly poke around near the corner of the pen, flag the monument, and leave. I'd make sure to note the dog on the worksheet for the crew to be aware of when they returned to complete the boundary survey.

My assessment of the plans for the immediate future wasn't quite accurate. I approached slowly and calmly and talked softly to the dog, which gave out a low growl while baring those beautiful, sharp, white teeth. It nosed right up to the corner of the pen and was literally growling only inches from my face as I poked around in the long grass. All of a sudden it stood up a bit taller, turned around, and took off around the doghouse to the other end of the pen. I thought maybe the owner was at home after all and had come out to talk to me.

That assessment proved inaccurate as well. You know how it is when you're looking closely for a corner monument; you tend to get focused and the rest of the world seems to disappear. I shouldn't have let that happen in this instance. I continued poking around like that for a couple more minutes.

My first bit of luck was when that dog chose to come around the pen in front of me rather than behind me. If it had chosen the opposite direction I am certain that my pants would have been torn in a location other than the legs. My next bit of luck occurred when he came around the corner; he stopped and paused for just a moment as if to make sure I was still there. I didn't hesitate at all.

In one fluid motion I went from hunched over almost on my knees to simultaneously springing up that pen's fence while throwing my shovel over the fence. It was a very athletic maneuver—born completely out of survival instinct. I almost made it unscathed but that dog could sure jump high. It grabbed my pant leg and held on. I remember thinking in the back of my head how fortunate I was that it only reached cloth. In spite of the adrenalin coursing through my veins, I couldn't climb further up due to the dog's weight. For a moment we were frozen together on the fence. He wasn't letting go and I couldn't climb. Then I felt it. He started jerking his head and that was just enough to force me down a bit. I was thinking that I'd better think of something quick when fate helped me out with another bit of luck. I was wearing old, torn blue jeans, of course, which began to tear more as he jerked his head until they tore right around in a circle at about mid-thigh. Now that dog was holding on to that material but the material was hung up on my ankle. He was just low enough that I could get my opposite foot over there and I kicked off my shoe to let the whole bundle—pant leg, shoe, and dog—tumble back down on the ground together.

I had been pulling so hard that with the sudden release of all that weight I almost flew up and over that fence. On the way down the other side my other pant leg caught on the top of the fence. You know how chain link fences have those sharp points on top? I found myself dangling upside down and once again face to face with that dog. Only this time I wasn't feeling quite as secure as before. I thought he was going to chew his way right through that fence when all of a sudden he just stopped, stood up a bit taller, turned around, and took off around the pen. I had seen this before and I knew I'd better do something quick. With great effort I pushed away from that fence and pulled down with my legs and tore my other pant leg right off. I tumbled down on the ground head first and without hesitation rolled over, picked up my shovel, and headed for the front of the pen.

My luck was holding. The dog must have had to finish digging his hole under the fence the first time he came through it to get out. He had probably been in a hurry then and so had to squeeze through and now he was trying to squeeze back through. I caught him about half-way with my shovel on his snout. There was a loud whimper and he backed off and out of the hole. But there we were, face to face for the third time. It was a true standoff. When either one of us made any move, the other countered. If he moved for the hole, I raised my shovel. If I made for the gate, he moved for the hole. After a few moments of this we both started to relax into the waiting game. He actually lay down on the grass right where he was and I took advantage by backing off enough to reach first his water dish and then his food

bowl and threw both of them right into that hole. Then to make certain I drug the whole doghouse over and covered the hole up from the inside. He knew there was no way in or out now except for the gate so he moved over to it and sat down to wait.

Apparently we had been making quite a commotion because the neighbors, who had been outside, heard my screaming over top of the dog's growling and barking and had alerted the dog's owner.

After the owner was finally able to stop laughing, he contained the dog inside the house and I humbly let myself out of my self-imposed prison. Of course we got to talking about why I was there and what I was up to. I showed him the plats and deeds I had been carrying to help convince him I was who I said I was. He had known about the upcoming survey anyway. He had said that he didn't think that the dog would be a problem for us because after he had moved in, a few years back, he and another lot owner had purchased the lot in between them and split it in half. I asked him why he was telling me that and with a sly smile on his face he told me that the monument I was looking for was about 150' down the line away from the dog's pen. Lucky for me, huh?

About the Author



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