

Joe Kilgore

Drinking Whiskey In The Backyard

I'm sitting here with a tumbler of Maker's Mark in my left hand and a Colt Single Action Army Peacemaker in my right. The glass of Kentucky straight bourbon feels particularly comfortable. It's oval with an indentation near the bottom of the glass for your thumb. Makes holding it easy with little or no chance of slippage. Of course it's unlikely that would happen anyway because the glass doesn't sweat. Being unencumbered by ice. The Peacemaker obviously feels heavier, but the balance is right. Particularly when you cock the hammer and point the barrel at whatever makes the wrong decision to look up, move or make a run for it.

I like drinking whiskey. Not just the taste. I like the way it sounds sliding from the bottle and hitting the bottom of the glass. I like the way it looks when you hold it up to the setting sun and the amber color takes on a golden glow. I like the way it glides silently across your tongue, then announces its presence in your throat with a jolt of heat. I like the way it gets to your stomach quickly and sits there like it belongs, warming you from the inside out.

The glass itself is almost as important as the whiskey. A short glass is always better. Tall glasses makes it look unimportant. Almost like you're dirtying a clean glass for no good reason. And the glass definitely should be round. Not one of those square types where you have to find one of the corners before you take a drink. Yep, two fingers in a stout glass looks the way whiskey ought to look. Simple, straightforward, unpretentious. Like you're actually serious about it.

I like holding the Colt while I drink whiskey. It eliminates voluntary or even involuntary criticism. Especially when the hammer is cocked and the arm is leveled. Hell, even when you bend your elbow and ease the hammer back to its initial position, you still avoid most contemptuous looks and muffled expressions of disgust. Funny how a stiff drink and a loaded pistol encourage nosy neighbors to mind their own business.

Now don't get the wrong impression. I'm not some alcoholic malcontent flaunting my disregard for the community in which I reside. If I were, I'd sit in the swing on my front porch and really stir things up. No, I'm content to do my drinking in the privacy of my backyard. And should I feel the need to fire off a round or two, I always aim downward to make sure the bullet winds up in the earth after it's passed through whatever critter or varmint I choose to execute for trespassing on my property. Don't get squeamish on me. Domestic pets like dogs, cats and birds, I just run off. I'll even shoo away bunny rabbits and squirrels. But snakes, rodents and armadillos are fair game. Many carry disease, you know. Some even say the plague. But I'm not sure I believe that.

I've had quite a bit of whiskey today. In fact there seem to be only three fingers left in

the bottle. But there are still six rounds in the revolver. So apparently I've yet to once more rouse the ire of the neighborhood. You know about ire, don't you? How it starts out silently. At first it's just people talking to themselves. Then it's given voice. They tell their spouses that the guy on the other side of the fence is a loon who just sits in his backyard drink-

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ing whiskey. And it's quite likely he's psychotic. Because he always has a pistol with him. He's even been known to fire the thing. Kicking up dirt and dust. That's dangerous, though, isn't it? The bullet could ricochet off a stone and hit a child. Better call the county sheriff. Let him know this guy's a menace. Of course no one's ever been hurt. And he's really only fired a time or two in the last year or so. But still, it's not right. Even if it is legal. Best to ostracize him. Don't speak to him or his wife.

Keep the children away. Treat the occupants of that house like lepers. Hope they'll soon

realize they aren't wanted here. Maybe they'll move out. The sooner the better.

Neighborhood ire has never really affected me one way or the other. I don't really

care what they think. My wife, on the other hand, took it more personally. She would

have liked to get to know some of them better. Especially on days when she felt well enough to go out on the front porch and sit for a while. It would have been nice if a passing neighbor or two would have said hi, hello, how are you. But no, none of them ever did. They were all too leery of me. Another one of the ways I let her down, I guess.

Did I mention I buried my wife this morning? Small funeral. Just a few family members. Ran them off quick as I could. Been sitting here drinking ever since. Thinking about whiskey, the Colt and my wife. She wasn't afraid of it, you know. Even asked me once, when the pain got so bad she couldn't stand it, to use it on her. Said if I really loved her, I'd do it. Said if a dog was hurting that bad I'd put it down. But I couldn't bring myself to do it. Not sure whether that means I loved her too much or not enough. Sure as hell means I wasn't as tough as she was.

So now I'm trying to decide whether to follow my last swallow of bourbon with a bullet.

Neighbors certainly wouldn't mind. But she'd probably be disappointed in me. And I disappointed her more than I ever wanted to already. Guess I'll just blow that garden snake to hell and gone. And have another drink.

JOE KILGORE' currently has a novel in bookstores titled "The Blunder."