

Gerald Must Deal With a Huge Challenge

"This is really cool," Vince thought. "Large, lots of bird feeders, quiet, many trees. And most of all, it's for me and Velma ... alone! I'll look around to see which spot might become my favourite."

"Yup; this is going to work. I can see me lying here looking at some young 'uns frolicking in the sun."



"Kia Ora" mate; here is Vince and Velma's world: Trees, brooks, animals, and ponds. Birds sing, coyotes howl, deers play fetch, while sadly, people hunt them. Benton forest is Vince's home. It's a forest the Government protects. Except, certain times during the year, they allow people to hunt deer. Probably the Government thinks too many deer live in the forest. So the deer population does not become a nuisance to people who live close to the forest, many years ago, the Government decided to limit the number of deer in the forest by allowing hunting sometimes.

Can you imagine how awful it is during hunting season? In that period, birds and animals try to keep out of sight. Hunters drive noisy off-road vehicles. Fumes gush, tires make a loud splatting sound, branches break as hunters race through tracks ... weapons in hand. Bang! ... Bang! ... Bang! ... roars the hunters' weapons. A deer falls here, a deer falls there, while animals scamper for safety. That's how Vince and his family found Vince's beautiful spot. A hunter fired at a deer resting beside Vince. Terrified, Vince ran, and ran, and ran 'till he was out of the forest and in an open space. He had no idea he would come to love this place and spend so much time there with his wife, Velma.

Vince found Joshua and Rebecca's backyard, part of The Shadowy Plain, and decided it would be their home away from their forest home.

(Did you know animals have homes away from their regular homes? Like a cottage, which some Mom and Dad's have).

At the south western end of their two and a half acre property, Joshua and Rebecca are creating their own mini forest. With over 100 trees planted to date, The Shadowy Plain backs into Benton forest.

One day, Vince and Velma were relaxing by one of five bird feeders in the Shadowy Plain's forest. Once again, they had outsmarted Joshua and Rebecca's squirrel-baffle, and ate all the black oil sunflower seeds in the bird-feeders. Besides, they ate many nuts from the Walnut trees.

Wait one minute! Have you ever heard of a squirrel-baffle? It's a thingie that fits around a pole to prevent squirrels from climbing the pole to reach the bird-feeder. Oops! did I tell you Vince and Velma were squirrels? That's okay, you are clever, so you figured it out! Right? Sorry about that matey. Shall we get on with our story?

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One morning, Joshua strolled in his forest to watch birds feeding at the bird-feeders. "Oh no!" he shouted, and ran to the house to get Rebecca.

"Come quickly, you must see this!"

"What?" Rebecca asked. "What's wrong?"

"Hurry, you won't believe it!"

Joshua and Rebecca rushed to the backyard and what they saw shocked them. There, wrapped around a bird feeder was a large squirrel, chomping away at the bird seed in the feeder.

As Vince ate, Joshua and Rebecca hid and stared in disbelief.

"How did he get up there?" Joshua asked. "How did he get above the baffle?" He continued.

"Hmm, this is weird. How long have they been doing this? I can't believe the squirrels have been eating the bird's feed!" Joshua stated, excitedly.

Meantime, Vince saw Joshua and Rebecca and scampered into Benton forest. In his haste, he almost crushed a small, sick squirrel laying in his path.

"Hey, get out the way, you!" snapped Vince. "What's with you? Those people could hurt me if I don't disappear quickly."

"I am sorry, sir. I can't walk far. You see, sir, I was in that tree (pointing to a tall Blue Spruce tree in Benton Forest) and Bilbo, my friend, the cool deer, was resting below, when a mean hunter shot at Bilbo, missed, but the bullet grazed my leg and throat. Since then, I can't walk far, and I can't eat ... but I can drink." The sick squirrel said.

"That's too bad, I don't know where my family is, so I must find them! Vince shouted as he raced further in the forest.

"Velma, I just saw this wimpy guy (you didn't know squirrels called other squirrels, "guys," did, you? Well, they do.)

"What do you mean, 'wimpy'?" Velma asked.

"Well, he said he can't run, walk, or eat." Vince said.
(Did you notice Vince got it wrong? The squirrel didn't say that. But that's typical of Vince; he doesn't listen.)

Chuckling, Vince continued, "the sick squirrel says he can drink only. Nice story, eh!"

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"Vincent, that's mean! (when Velma gets annoyed she calls Vince, Vincent). Why didn't you bring him home so we could look after him? Go and invite him to stay with us! Don't be so mean! I don't believe you!"

"Really, Velma, the little guy is a loser and ..."

Before Vince could finish his sentence, Velma said in a calm, cool, stern voice...

"Vincent! I don't want you ever to use that word "loser" again. Nobody is a loser. The little guy might do things that's not smart, but that's his behaviour. He isn't a loser. Do you understand me?"



"My name is Gerald. Thank you, sir, for bringing me to your home. I do not have a Mom or Dad, so, I am very thankful to be in your home, sir. I promise to be good." The sick squirrel said, when he relaxed at Vince and Velma's home.

It was dinner time, and Velma said, "I will go and dig up some nuts for dinner and you can tell us more about you."

Gerald sulked, and Velma knew something was wrong, so, as a good Mom, she said, "Gerald, is something wrong?"

"Err, hmm, aw... eh, well, you see, Ma'am, since the shooting, I can't swallow nuts, corn or birdseed."

"Really, so what do you eat?" asked Velma.

"Well, that's a challenge. I have been eating the lovely vegetables from the garden over there." Gerald said, pointing to Rebecca's vegetable garden. "Actually, I prefer eating this way. The vegetables are tasty."

(Do you know Rebecca doesn't know some of her vegetables are feeding Gerald ... let's wait and see what happens ...)

"I have some vegetables so, let's eat." Velma said.

They had a lovely meal. Gerald told them how he lost his Mom and Dad during a fierce winter storm. Since then, Bilbo, a deer, and his family have been looking after him. But after the shooting that hurt him, Gerald lost contact with Bilbo, that's why he was so happy to be with Velma and Vince.

Though Gerald had what seemed like a hard life, he was happy. His view of life was simple. Every day is a "present," he opens it, uses it, and is thankful for it, because he

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knows he might not have another "present" tomorrow. Did you get that? Gerald doesn't complain about what he has. He looks to see how he can get the most from what he has today, and from where he is today. He doesn't try to change today because he knows he can't. He knows, too, God is in control. So, he understands it's always good to be content or to be satisfied with what he has... because, that's what he has. Often, Gerald's Mom told him, "Son, we can start only from where we are, not somewhere else!"

I think it would be a good idea to stop reading now and think about Gerald's idea. Maybe your Mom or Dad can talk with you about it. Okay?

Back to our story. Truly, Gerald was especially thankful for each day. That day when Vince ran away from him in a hurry, he felt sad. But, he was thankful to be alive, so he sat there admiring Rebecca's garden and fell asleep. He was even happier when Vince woke him and invited him home. Wow! That was so good.

After a few months with Vince and family, Gerald healed, but still, though he went on outings with Vince, he ate no nuts or seeds. Daily, They "raided" The Shadowy Plain's bird-feeders, nut trees, and rarely, Rebecca's vegetable garden. Gerald liked those trips. Sometimes, he wished he ate the seeds and nuts from the Walnut, Chestnut, or Hazel nut trees. Walnuts looked so yummy, but he feared his throat might hurt, so he stuck with eating Rebecca's vegetables only.

Vince looked after his family well. He collected and buried nuts daily, so, in winter, they would have enough food. He planned trips carefully, working out in detail how much nuts he needed to set aside daily. He told Gerald his most important job was providing for his family.

Though Gerald didn't eat nuts, Vince's activities impressed Gerald. But he was concerned. What would he eat this winter, the first winter since the hunter shot him accidentally? He can't store vegetables!

Yes, what would Gerald eat? What do you think?

Gerald didn't think Vince would understand his problem, so he decided he would discuss it with Velma, whom he called Aunt Velma.

After supper that night, Gerald said, "Aunt Velma, can I ask you something?"

"Sure dear."

"Err... hmm ... you know how Uncle Vince collects nuts so you have food during winter?"

"Yes dear."

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"Well, I don't know what to store for the winter. I don't eat nuts, I don't eat birdseed, I eat only vegetables ... and bark from some trees." Gerald said.

"Yes dear, that looks like a problem, but I know Uncle Vince and I can help you. We will talk about it tonight, and tomorrow we will tell you what we think. Don't worry, dear, have a good night's sleep,"

Gerald was excited. He trusted Aunt Velma. He knew she cared about him and would help him with his problem.

"Good night, Aunt Velma. Good night, Uncle Vince."

"Pleasant dreams, Gerald." Vince and Velma said.



"Gerald, Gerald! Why are you screaming! What's wrong?"

Slowly Gerald rose from his bed. He yawned ... stretched ... looked left ... right ... straight ahead. He squinted, stared, rubbed his eyes, and then said, "Mom, Mom, is that you Mom? Oh, Mom, I love you, please never leave me! I love you and Dad so much."

"What are you talking about Gerald?"

"Oh Mom, I am so happy ... Wow! What a dream! Later, I'll tell you and Dad about it... Mom, I love you and Dad so very much."

Bye, bye!

Written 26 April on a flight from Auckland to Sydney, for the wonderful talented eight year old, Alberta, of Christchurch, New Zealand, who asked me to write about "a squirrel named Gerald who didn't like nuts."

"Teacher, which is the great commandment in the Law?" And he said to him, "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. This is the great and first commandment. And a second is like it: You shall love your neighbor as yourself. (Matthew 22:36-39, ESV)