

## **The Price Is Right**

Lori loved to watch the television game show, "The Price Is Right." All other television programs she found taxing. But when "The Price Is Right" came on, there was no need for any further explanation.

Her husband was a logger. The two of them lived in camp, where ever the job took them somewhere in the Tongass National Forest. At the time of this tale they lived in a house trailer, which was chained down on top of a floating log raft, which in turn was tied to other rafts forming a floating community secured to the shore by logging chains to ancient western hemlocks. There was a store on the raft for general needs. This logging outfit even provided television, at least, in the evenings.

Everybody knew that Lori was a "The Price is Right" fan and also agreed that Lori was a wonderful cook. Whatever she put in the pot always smelled good. And so on this summer evening she cooked chili con carne whose sharp scent wafted out the window and up into the forest, to which the rafts were moored. The chili was well along when "The Price Is Right" came on. Lori stirred the chili and ran down the hallway, spoon in hand, to watch the program. The spoon helped her remember that the chili bubbled on the stove.

After a few minutes of the program, she heard racket coming from the kitchen. It was time to give the chili another stirring anyway so down the hall she hurried to the far end of the house-trailer.

Humans aren't the only ones to appreciate the smell of well-made chili. A black bear was doing its best to pull its bulk through a small kitchen window just above the sink.

Lori was raised in Southeast Alaska and as a child she heard the old Tlingit stories about what a black bear might do if one found a little girl like Lori. Even though she'd grown up, she carried the very real fear of being eaten alive by black or brown or any other kind of bear. She screamed and started for the door but then stopped. She realized that most of the bear was on the outside and only a little bit on the inside. To change this state of affairs would take the bear several minutes. Because the panel bidding was about to end on the program, she ran back down the hall to see what had happened. Once she arrived at the television set, she saw she carried the spoon and remembered that she had not stirred the chili. So back down the hall she ran.

The bear, wedged in the window, had made some progress.

Lori quickly stirred the chili and seeing that the bear still had a way to go, she ran back to the television. Her guess on the dishwasher was a good fifty dollars too high furthermore she'd been underbid but what about the bear? Once again she ran down the hall, taking note that the bear had pushed in his head and shoulders but she estimated that he had quite a bit of belly to go. Lori stirred the chili and ran back to the TV. A whole bedroom set was up for bid. Momentarily forgetting the bear and the chili, she thought how she would like to have the furniture. She'd put it in storage against the time when they would move onto land - into a house that wouldn't move. That's when she heard the crash. Mentally she measured off the distance between the hall's entrance into the kitchen, the sink, and her escape route through the kitchen door of the trailer. The thought of being even partially eaten by the bear brought her to a full run down the hallway.

The window wasn't getting any larger and the bear's belly wasn't getting any smaller, so the bear changed his plan. While the chili was enough to bring anybody out of the woods, the cookie jar was just there on the counter and within easy reach. With a swipe of the paw, he claimed the jar while knocking a drinking glass to the floor. His retreat may have been brought on by the discomfort of windowsill gouging his ribs or it could have been caused by the bothersome woman who kept running in and out of the kitchen.

With the bear out the window along with the cookie jar, Lori's fear subsided. She remembered to stir the chili and then ran back to the TV. She had overshot the price by only four dollars and change, which was closer than any of the panelists. Had she been on the program, the bedroom set would have been hers.

**End**