

Soon I was back in my office, congratulating myself, when my wife burst in again. “He’s back!” Indeed he was. Another string of firecrackers fizzled. Finally, as I was lighting a third string, the bear ambled off into the distance, presumably well-fed and looking for a toothpick and a snooze.

The next day the doorbell unexpectedly rang. Standing on the porch were two strangely bearish men who courteously identified themselves as Montana game wardens. It turned out that a bear had once again broken into my garbage can, which I had carried down to the main road for pick-up the next day. My address was on the can, and they put two and two together.

“Sir, did you re-secure the trash in the bags that had been ripped open by the bear?” I could not tell a lie. Moreover, they were packing heat on their belts. Soon they handed me a written warning citing me for “failure to store feed attractants (trash) in a manner that would prevent black bear from gaining access to it.” They tipped their hats and left.

What I now know is that the game wardens were trying to protect us both: the bear and me. We are ambivalent about bears. We want them, but not too close. In recent years, the population of bears has exploded in suburban areas from Montana to Maine. Thanks to people like me who leave their trash unsecured, the awkward encounters between bears and humans have also proliferated. As a result, more states are loosening up their restrictions. It’s open season on hunting bears.

The upshot? I now have a new home accessory: No, it’s not a high-powered rifle. It’s a “Fully Automated, Bear-Resistant, 95 Gallon Refuse Container.” Everyone should get one.

Mr. Jones, the former managing editor of People and Money magazines, is the author of “Great Expectations: America and the Baby Boom Generation” (Coward, McCann/Putnam, 1980).

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