

Wounded.

The man was wounded. He had foolishly allowed himself to trust again; that nebulous emotion exposed him so that, when broken, it set off a chain reaction of emotions he needed to process until they ran their course. The man knew the process because he was experienced in his personal survival.

Their reunion had come after half a decade of contentious communications that resulted in another five years of no communication. The man was content that his son was home, and now safe.

Finally, after 19 months of what had felt like meticulously avoiding conflict, the situation exploded during what had been an evening of calm. The man asked his son, who was yelling and swearing at an MMA fight being broadcast, to keep it down, as his yelling was extremely loud in an otherwise quiet evening. Out of the calm, his son became violent, smashing windows and damaging property. The scene grew so heated that at one point the man thought his son was going to punch him.

His son had raged, lost all control and was violent; his son had packed up everything he could get in his truck, and honked his horn as he left.

As the man sat in the darkness of midnight, he was rather surprised that the first emotion he felt was relief. The man inhaled as deeply as he could, followed by the longest exhale he had had in a long time. Both felt so good he repeated them several times.

Later that same night, the man texted his son, but as was his son's habit when angry, he had blocked him from sending texts or phoning. The man only hoped his son was okay. His son was beyond his reach now, and that seemed scary to the man.

The next day, the wound dominated him, demanding consequences and a place to lay blame. The man fought the urge to blame; he let his emotions come and go, and he sat and waited. He listened as his arrogant mind blamed him for enabling his son to do this, and he listened as his mind also said, "Yes, but this was what my son was capable of. Now we both know." He listened as his caring heart quietly wept for the happiness that could have been. Together, his mind and heart collaborated, and still the man listened, for he knew his heart and mind would figure this out.

However, because it was easier for him, he would now slide away from everyone and everything and let his feelings run their course.

The following day, as the man thought about cleaning the guest unit where his son had lived, he consciously calmed himself because, while he knew he had enabled his son to be what his son was capable of, he hadn't considered this scenario. The optimist in him had imagined success, and this was definitely not that.

The man again surveyed the guest unit, and it was a pigsty; the floors and surfaces were filthy, a window was broken, the screen lying in the dirt outside amidst broken glass, two blinds were broken and bent, and the front door was damaged and would no longer close. Empty liquor bottles littered the countertops, and there was no more denying his son was an addict.

Before he could clean inside, he decided to clean the outside mess; bags of debris were piled high from a job his son had done demolishing a bathroom ceiling. The bags had been thrown into a heap to make room for his son's belongings so he could leave. His son's tools were also strewn around the guest unit, the porch, and on the ground. He raked up the broken glass, straightened the screen, and refitted it to the window. The man straightened things up, took the bags of debris to the local dump, and cleaned and arranged the tools on the deck. Then, after picking glass out of the sink's drain, he washed dishes.

On the second day, he washed more dishes he found caked in dry food in the cupboards, cleaned the microwave, gas stove, refrigerator, and countertops, and took out more garbage. He found an empty box and placed the tools he had found in it.

The bathroom floor had three empty plastic bags the toilet rolls had come in, and the empty brown toilet rolls had also been tossed onto the floor. The toilet and bathroom floor were disgusting to even look at, as was the shower, and cleaning that room took an entire day. His progress was slow.

Finally, he got to the last room, the bedroom, and the man decided to vacuum first. As he pushed the vacuum in front of him and pulled it back, the dirt was so deep he saw the path the vacuum had taken. The man persisted, and many hours later the bedroom was dusted, the bed was changed and turned, the walls were clean, and the floor was vacuumed.

While he knew the guest unit needed more cleaning, he decided to stop cleaning for a day or two.

As the man took a break, he remembered that after last year's harvest, there were nearly five pounds of home-grown weed, cured and in glass jars. It was strong weed too. The man smoked but so little he'd not made an impact on the amount of stored weed. Those once-full jars were now empty. His son hadn't taken the weed with him; he had smoked it all. Doing the math, the man calculated his son had smoked nearly eight ounces per month since harvest time ten months ago, and there were copious amounts of alcohol consumed too.

He told two people the story of what had happened, and to another, only that a troubling family incident had occurred. The man didn't like telling negative stories, especially if they included his son's reputation, and since he wasn't asking for help, he didn't.

Another friend was a 4-year-old deer he had known since her birth, and, like a couple of other deer he had known over the years, this deer was exceptionally friendly and trusting. He hadn't seen her in nine months, and she had only returned several days earlier.

As the man went to check his mail, the doe happily came running over and let him touch her head. He fed her, and after eating she lay down under a nearby shady tree. Hours later, the man

went out to smoke a cigarillo, and the doe got up and came over to within feet of where he sat. She calmly looked him in the eyes; he looked back, and they kept eye contact for several minutes. He sensed she was telling him to be present because, in the present, his life was good; nothing bad was happening right now. Then she walked back into the woods where, he presumed, her fawns were waiting.

After the doe left, the man noticed his anguish and heartbreak had stopped; those things had happened days before. Right now, however, his mind had stopped reliving that awful evening.

Smiling as he thought about the doe, the man added another happy memory to his list of amazing wildlife moments.

Written by Peter Skeels © 7-25-2026