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"Keeping Our Beaches Bare"

DEAR ABBY

Senator gives Abby the straight skinny on swimming nude in Vermont

Thursday, October 4, 2001

DEAR ABBY: I chuckled over your hot tub letters. When I was a young prosecutor in Vermont, an overly ambitious prosecutor in another county had someone arrested for skinny-dipping – basically out of sight of everybody – in a river. The local judge actually sentenced the “perpetrator” to jail, which caused uproar.

Subsequently, I got a call from the state police about a complaint of skinny-dipping. Apparently the officer arrived to find an older woman at a farmhouse on a dirt road with no water in sight. She said: “Don’t worry. Go across that field and climb up through those woods about a mile and a half, and you’ll find a stream where they are bathing naked. But go very quietly, because if they hear you, they’ll put their clothes on!”

The trooper suggested that maybe he should check with me; I was the state’s attorney at the time. I ensconced myself at my family’s summer farm during the Fourth of July weekend and researched the issue. I began by reviewing old Norman Rockwell paintings, thoughtfully resurrected by the ACLU, showing such activities taking place allegedly in

Vermont. (Along this line, I was unable to either confirm or refute the persistent rumor that Vermont’s No. 1 politician, Calvin Coolidge, had also engaged in such activity in this state while subject to Vermont law.)

I also discussed – after grants of immunity – experiences of this nature enjoyed by some of Vermont’s prose, authors, judges, law enforcement officers and sailboat operators. After checking the statute of limitations, I even reviewed past histories of some of my contemporaries during my teen-age years. Not to be outdone, each member of my office offered to investigate this matter in an undercover manner (so to speak).

It turned out that most Vermonters I talked to have engaged in such scandalous activity at some time in their lives.

Therefore, to guide any law enforcement officer so lacking in other criminal matters to investigate, I offered in all seriousness the following guidelines:

(1) In public areas and semi-public areas: Nude bathing is not acceptable. In such instances the officer receiving the complaint should order the person to dress. Failure to stay clothed should result

in a summons to court.

(2) On private land out of view of the public: The state has no legitimate interest and swimmers should be left alone.

(3) In secluded areas sometimes publicly used (rivers, swimming holes, etc.): If no member of the public is offended, no disorderly conduct has taken place. If members of the public complain, proceed as in No. 1 above.

I understand that J. Edgar Hoover was infuriated at the thought of this young prosecutor in Vermont treating the matter so lightly. – SEN. PATRICK J. LEAHY, WASHINGTON, D.C.

DEAR SEN. LEAHY: You put the matter properly in perspective. That’s only to be expected from someone whose home state shows such respect for the rights and personal freedoms of its citizens. My hats off to you. (But that’s all!)

P.S. I wonder why J. Edgar Hoover was infuriated. Rumor has it he was an undercover man himself.

Editor’s Note: Dear Abby is written by Pauline Phillips and daughter Jeanne Phillips. ☆

