

DADDY I WANT A BEARCAT! AND I WANT IT NOW!

By Dr. Bruce Loisel

I love Veruca Salt's covetous snotty demand for procuring one of those lovable little men that sing very very mean songs about fat people, nose picking, TV addiction and other societal ills of the late 60's. So what if Veruca actually did get an Oompa Loompa? Anyone with a cursory understanding of narcissistic personality disorder and the seething underlying resentment among Oompa Loompa's towards the over-privileged would come to the obvious conclusion that it would not have ended well.

43 years later the Santa Cruz police department got, what Veruca with all her daddy's money could not, an Oompa Loompa of their very own. And they were more than willing to shun public dissent, exploit fears and distort facts to get their beloved Oompa-Loompa, a glimmering new Lenco BearCat. It's not going to end well.

A Lenco BearCat is a wheeled armored personnel carrier designed for military and law enforcement use. It's in use by numerous military forces and law enforcement agencies around the world. BearCat is an acronym, standing for Ballistic Engineered Armored Response Counter Attack Truck (why am I always surprised when multi-multi millions are spent on design, production and marketing, and the best a company can do is some cheap contrived acronym – Go Team BearCat!). The Santa Cruz City Council voted to accept a \$251,000 grant for the vehicle in December 2014 and that choice sparked numerous protests.

The BearCat can carry up to 10 people into a dangerous scene with officers able to point weaponry out of windows on either side. However, SCPD Police Chief Vogel assured the jittery community that the vehicle won't contain an optional mechanical rotating turret with cupola and weapon mounting system for sophisticated, high-powered assault rifles (what a relief!). "We didn't consider these options because we are looking to use our BearCat as a rescue vehicle as opposed to an armed assault vehicle," Vogel said.

Geographic location is one of the SCPD's arguments for the acquisition of the BearCat. According to the SCPD the closest BearCats are located in Santa Clara and Monterey counties, and could take too long for Santa Cruz to borrow during an emergency. Santa Clara's BearCat was most recently used during locally during an 11-hour standoff with an armed man in Watsonville in August 2014. Apparently Santa Clara and Monterey are now an 11-hour drive to Santa Cruz. It actually takes 1 hour and 2 minutes to drive from Santa Clara to Watsonville and 32 minutes to drive from Monterey to Watsonville...oddly, Santa Cruz is a 28 jaunt from Watsonville.

In addition to training officers for responding to terrorist events (Santa Cruz is of course a hot-bed of terrorist activity – stay BearCat strong Santa Cruz), Vogel said several incidents in recent years would have justified deploying a BearCat, namely the February 2013 killings of Santa Cruz police detectives Butch Baker and Elizabeth Butler. But Chief Vogel admits there was nothing a BearCat could have done to save Baker and Butler after a sexual-assault suspect ambushed them with a handgun. Not 100% following Chief Vogel's selling point?

According to the Santa Cruz Police Department BearCat use policy (706.2.7 BearCat Rescue Vehicle), "the BearCat rescue vehicle is specialized equipment designed for specific purposes. The vehicle is not intended to be used for routine patrol or day-to-day operations." The Santa Cruz police department cleverly employs the restraint eliminating phrase, "This includes, but is not limited to..."

- 1) public safety emergencies, where life threatening conditions exist
- 2) the extraction of persons at risk
- 3) the need to insert police, fire, and emergency medical services into a dangerous environment
- 4) ballistic or projectile protection
- 5) high-risk vehicle stops
- 6) high-risk warrant service
- 7) active shooters
- 8) unsecured crime scenes

The policy goes on and includes another disclaimer, "this policy recognizes that it is not possible to catalog or anticipate all situations where the BearCat rescue vehicles capabilities are necessary and/or appropriate," in other words the use of the vehicle is at the discretion of the SCPD, AKA "carte blanche." Since the above 8 scenarios almost never happen in real life, either the targeted use of the vehicle will have to be expanded or it will sit in mothballs as a quarter million dollars of wasted taxpayer money.

According to the SCPD policy, the police manager would have to be able to assess one of the above 8 critical situations and provide responsible authorization in time for the "BearCat" to be deployed. The problem is, five of eight of the above situations occur almost instantaneously (1,3,4, 5, 7). One of the terrible traits of violence is that it many times occurs with little or no warning.

Another selling point of this vehicle is that any expense is justified because it might save one life, and in this case the lives are law enforcement personnel, who are valued at a greater rate than homeless, poor people and just about everyone else. Case in point, when was the last time you saw a funeral procession on the news for a commercial fisherman? Commercial fishermen put themselves in harms way to provide the public with delicious and essential food, and it is one of the most dangerous job in the United States. We would starve without these brave souls yet they haven't achieved the label of essential service persons.

This argument fails in almost every imaginable scenario. For example, if we allowed this philosophy to rule our travel safety decisions, every person would be driving a Mercedes Benz and every flight would have the meticulous security preening of Air Force One. It's a flawed and unrealistic line of reasoning that seems to work, because nobody wants to point out there is a practical point in which money trumps human safety – compromising safety for reducing expenses is the only way we can sustain ourselves economically.

Police work is no doubt dangerous at times, but they are pushing it when they continually trying to use the threat of an ever present danger as an excuse for irresponsible spending and overall poor behavior. The police are well paid professionals. The following is a list of occupations in the United States considered more dangerous than police work: loggers, fishermen, pilots/flight engineers, roofers, structural iron and steel workers, electrical power line installers and repairers, drivers, sales workers, truck drivers, farmers, ranchers and agricultural managers, and construction laborers. All these are considered jobs that are more dangerous than police work but certainly are not as romantic. It's good to be a political darling.

Accept the BearCat, it's going to happen. The SC City Council and Mayor are in bed with the police. It's a back scratching relationship in which the City Council genuflects to the police for that all important law enforcement endorsement come election time. The police in turn get the Oompa-Loompa they so desperately want, and once again do like the Oompa Loompa doompadee do doompadee doo.