

Best wishes
Larry Watson

FOR THE LOVE OF NATURE

Tales From The Lee Side

**Text and photographs by Larry Watson.
Caricatures by Frank Pugliese.
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DEDICATION

To Carole --

for years of tender loving care of
Woofie and Champagne --
and her concern for Bucky



ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Foremost, a loving thank you to Carole, my wife and friend, for her patience and understanding, key suggestions, encouragement and support. For the countless hours as the stories were converted from longhand to the typewriter, and later to a computer, along with the editing and layout of the book prior to printing -- she deserves a gold medal.

A special thank you to my dear friend, Frank Pugliese, for his humorous caricatures and unusual wildlife creations. They are bold evidence of his hidden talent and an expression of his unique sense of humour.

All references to animals (formal and informal names) have the first letter capitalized, intentionally. They are the **Stars** of this book and deserve the recognition, for without them there would be no story.

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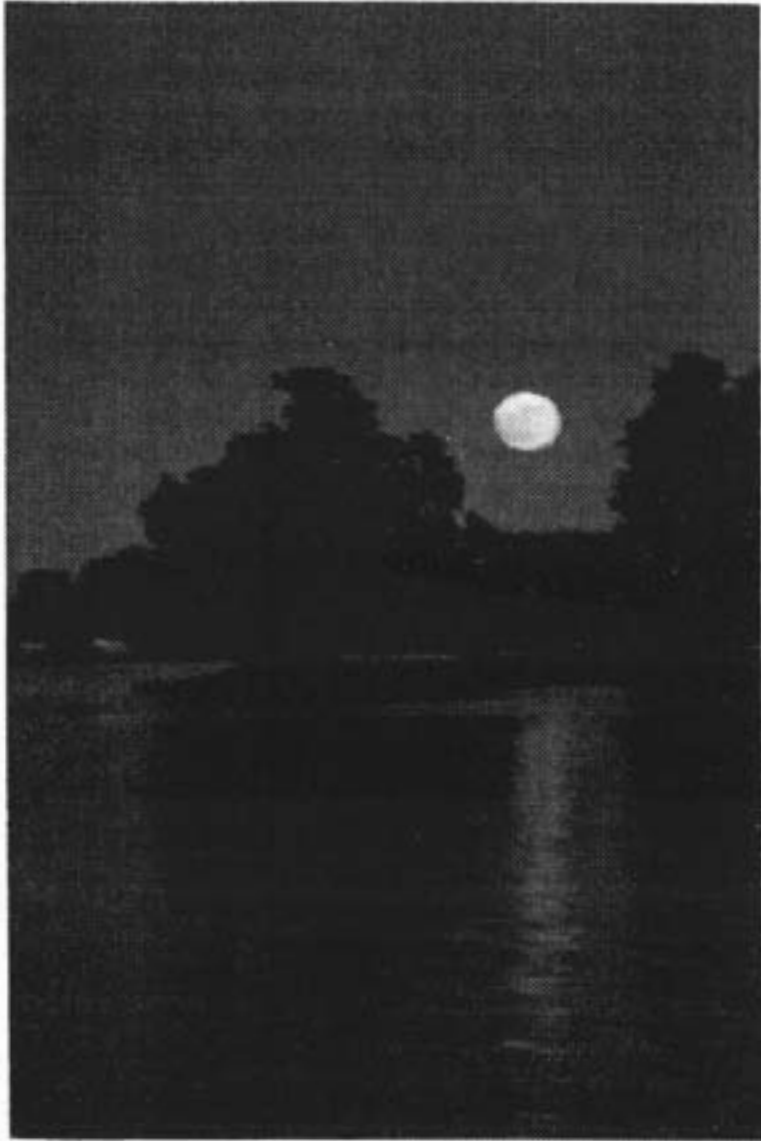
INTRODUCTION

FOR THE LOVE OF NATURE is a compilation of short stories that encompasses the natural world of nature, pets and domestic animals in an urban setting.

Although, in **Horse Feathers**, I resort to utter foolishness, the likes of which are quite obvious, the context is in essence accurate, as witnessed by myself, my wife, friends and neighbours. However, translations may be taken with a grain of salt.

Humour, at the expense of others, should never be a one way street. My advantage as the writer could be unfair in these real life situations. Consequently, I strive to reciprocate and hope you have a chuckle at my expense.

The contents record events that occurred on the Green River, New York City, in Orillia on Cedar Island, the waters of Lake Couchiching, Big Chiefs Island, the east side of Lake Simcoe and the western portion of Simcoe County, but mainly at our home on Couchiching Point -- here -- on the lee side.



ON THE LEE SIDE

For those of us who are fortunate enough to live on the east side of Couchiching Point, spring brings an early melt, at least two weeks before nature relaxes its icy grip on the westerly portion of the Point.

Here -- the lee side -- being the preferred location for a safe harbor, calm waters, protection from the north and west wind, an abundance of fish and wildlife and glorious sunrises. When the most romantic of heavenly moons floats up over the channel, one can be spellbound by its illuminating beauty.

A panoramic view gives us a kaleidoscope of interesting yachts and watercraft that ply the Trent Waterway System and the warm glow of the low sun on those frosty winter mornings warms our hearts, as well as our homes.

The open vista of our shoreline allows a grand view of Fern Resort and the Islands, the bay and the canal lined with beautiful homes, green manicured lawns and gardens, and a variety of pleasure boats berthed at the docks. All this, together with friendly neighbours, makes Couchiching Point an ideal place to live -- especially here -- on the lee side.

GUESS WHO CAME TO DINNER

Welcome to Hockey night in Canada with Foster Hewitt, live from Maple Leaf Gardens. The Leafs and Canadians were hot at it, the crowd roars, crazy legs Eddie Shack has a break-away, he shoots, and the puck sails over the glass.

An ample supply of ale was being consumed. Warm and cozy, I was in the company of my dear friends, Bill and Donna. Their comfy new home was nestled deep in the pines on the Green River and in the fieldstone fireplace that Bill's father, Marshall, had built -- the fire crackled and the flames danced -- everything was rosy.

The living room window overlooked the frozen river and fresh fallen snow covered the deck which skirted a sturdy white pine. Its trunk was a robust 2 feet plus and stood neigh on 60 feet with its branches trimmed up above the roof line. Suet was hung on this specimen to supplement the Birds winter diet of sunflower seeds, commercial feed mix and whatever berries still remained on the bushes.

Suddenly, a movement outside caught our attention and, to our pleasant surprise, a Flying Squirrel had floated down from the branches above and landed on this rich bounty. With noses to the glass, as we marvelled at this event with oohs and aahs, something even more dramatic was about to happen.



To our astonishment, a flurry of feathers covered the Flying Squirrel as a large Owl grasped the unlucky dinner guest in its talons and made off with its evening meal and left us all with our mouths wide open, and very, very dry.

FOR THE LOVE OF WOOFIE

When my BWIA flight touched down on the tarmac at Kennedy International in New York from Piarco International in Trinidad, it was just 60 minutes to Carole's on east 66th Street in Manhattan and a surprise welcome, along with my introduction to Woofie and her sister of sorts, Champagne. Woofie was about 14 human years at this time.

The first thing I noticed about this small white Toy Poodle was the Elizabethan collar she wore and a large bluish growth on her face, a terrible looking thing. A sight only a mother could love. The collar kept her from scratching at it, and hurting herself, and little did I know -- probably from hurting me as well.

After getting to know Woofie through repeated visits to New York City, and consequently marrying Carole, we became "friends at a distance" as I would phrase it. Allow to me clarify.

To watch Woofie eat was a real unusual experience. Carole would have no sooner put her food down than Woofie would attack it, just woof it down (hence the name, perhaps) as fast as she could, choking and gagging on it, like she was starved, which she wasn't, until the bowl was licked clean. Then, (look out) Woofie would go into a sort of hypnotic trance and would bare her

teeth and put on a performance the likes you have never seen or even heard of before. She would start snapping and snarling and swinging her head back and forth, just go absolutely bonkers, but never moving her feet from in front of the empty bowl, daring anyone to come close enough to touch it.

Approaching Woofie from behind as quietly as possible, I would sort of snatch her up; thank God she had the collar on because this Dog would twist and shake and fight and try her best to sink her teeth into me anywhere she could, like I said, go absolutely bonkers. The idea was go get her outside (the exterior door being raised made it impossible for **hurricane Woofie** to get out on her own). I would carry her over and as Carole opened the door, I would set her down on the patio where she could charge around like the running of the bulls in Pamploma, before settling down to wander around a bit and do her business. If you didn't know otherwise, you would swear she had rabies.

Carole and Woofie and I and Champagne would window shop up First Avenue on Sundays to 86th Street to visit Carole's Mom, Jean. We would often walk Woofie and Champy until they tired, old Woofie knew the routine. At around 69th Street, Woofie would automatically go into her taxi mode and step off the curb and sit, waiting to be picked up. Upon arriving at Jean's building, and a snarl at the doormen as she passed by, Woofie would run like the wind down the hallway

as soon as she got out of the elevator and head straight for Jean's door where she would be waiting. Old Woofie would go ripping in there and tear around the house. She would be so happy to see her Grandma.

After the Sunday meal, Jean would load up Carole with a variety of goodies to take home. It was like coming home from the supermarket. With our arms full and the four of us heading home, we would cross the lights at Second Avenue so we were heading downtown and hail a cab. Woofie would be in a satchel now to make things easier. Once inside, old Woofie would get interested in the leftovers and try to get at whatever she could, growling and snarling and fighting Carole to get at the food. It was scary. On all occasions I'd notice the drivers in the rear view mirrors, they always had an alarmed look on their faces when they realized that **hurricane Woofie** was out of the bag. Fortunately, there was a glass barrier separating the driver and the rear seat. Woofie behaved like a lion and Champagne like a lamb.

Jean and Carole really loved her and have many, many private memories of this old girl. However, this is my brief description of how Woofie lived from the time I met her until she passed on.

When the time came for Carole and me and Woofie and Champagne to move up to Canada, we used a Ryder moving van and created a little cubby hole for Champy behind us amid the

cartons and Woofie was placed between Carole and me in a basket. We set off up the freeway leaving Manhattan and the Bronx behind, heading for Albany. Up until that time, old Woofie and Champagne had never seen grass in their whole lives. The funniest thing happened when we had to make stops along the way. The first time I pulled over to the side of the road and we put Woofie and Champy in the long grass to do their business, it was just like setting a lizard down on hot sand. They were picking up one foot, then the other, and another. They didn't know what was going on. They didn't know what grass was. I think the grass tickled their bellies and feet. It's hard to imagine these Dogs had never seen grass. City-slickers.

In any case, we made the trip okay and we all managed to survive the year in the cottage. When first arriving in Orillia, we took the Dogs to see Kevin, the veterinarian, and he took a look at Woofie and saw that great big growth on her face and said, "Carole, you know I can remove that pretty easy and she will be all the better for it." Well, we were delighted. Carole had inquired in New York and it would have been difficult. So right away we had it removed, Kevin doing a super job. Woofie looked years younger and, by doing so, Carole was able to leave the collar off as there was nothing for Woofie to scratch. This was great.

Later, after moving into our new home, Carole decorated everything to be colour co-ordinated (the colour of her nail polish -- peachy-

pink) with Woofie's house included. It was a cute little wire framed tent with fringes around the top and a circular peachy coloured pillow, like something out of The Arabian Nights. In any case, that was Woofie's house and when she went in there, you never bothered her. That was her sanctuary. Woofie had her Arabian tent in a little room off the kitchen. Woofie didn't want to share the space at all with Champagne, she figured that was her room and that was it. Champy would have to find some place else to hang her hat, so she ended up sleeping against the stairs on the cool marble floor. Champagne needed that anyway with all her long hair. Woofie ended up with her own room, though Champy would still eat there, but old Woofie would boss her around.

The only time old Woofie would let me pick her up would be early in the morning. I could put her over my shoulder and rub her backside and talk to her and she would be okay. But, I wouldn't dare try it later on, especially after she ate. You know, not even try it. Because, if I ever tried to pick her up and put her on my shoulder, I know she would have chewed my ear off.

Old Woofie, as she got on, getting near the end, would be sleeping in her tent with her bum up on the pillow and her front paws and nose down on the floor -- snoring away.

It was around the end of May when old Woofie took seriously ill. She had been on a lot of medications, but holding her own. An urgent phone

call to Kevin was necessary and twenty minutes later we were in the examination room. It was her kidneys and pancreas -- a combination of things that were failing her -- in essence, primarily old age. In any case, we left her there for the weekend, Kevin thought it was best and on the Monday, June 8, 1987, we drove out to get her. She had taken a turn for the worse. So sad. Kevin suggested we might as well take her home. We gathered up Woofie, she was failing fast and put her in the car and started down the highway. Wrapped in a blanket and cradled in Carole's arms, old Woofie took a big gasp and died -- and the tears came down from our eyes.

We buried Woofie there in the flower garden, beside the front steps. Planted some nice flowers and Jean bought her a tree. When out there watering or just walking by, we always look down and say, "Hi Woofie, How's old Woofie?" Carole always talks to her. Well, you know, old Woofie was just short of 19 years (18 years, 11 months) when she died. Carole had a little brass plaque made in her memory. It's fastened there on the side of the planter, along with Champagne's now and Rubin the Canary. M&M's were a favourite of Woofie's, she still gets a few on those special days. Carole puts them there among the flowers that grow above her. They always disappear. Words are not sufficient to describe the loss of old Woofie. She is dearly missed.

Postscript

One Sunday morning, while still in bed and feeling rather amorous, Carole and I succumbed to our romantic instincts and got to doing what comes naturally. Ten minutes earlier we had brought old Woofie up on the bed with us and were petting her and hugging her, playing, etc. Woofie was too small, too old, too everything to get up and down on her own. Subsequently, being caught up in the heat of the moment, I was oblivious to what Woofie was up to. Suddenly, I became aware of this horrible smell and turning my head to the right, there hanging from Woofie's pink bum, not two inches from my nose, was a freshly baked turd. After gagging half a dozen times and leaping out of bed, Woofie and her baking, along with the blanket, were removed. With grim determination and in the face of adversity, fighting back tears and nausea and Carole's uncontrollable howls of hysterical laughter and, against all odds, I accomplished what no man could be expected to do under such trying circumstances. In spite of the dastardly deed done by old Woofie, I rose up to meet the challenge. Surely, an act above and beyond the call of normal duty.



FOR THE LOVE OF HERSCHEL

Herschel is the kind of Dog that once you meet him, and he takes to you and you to him, he's your buddy, forever. He was a pup when he first came to visit ten years ago, maybe at most a year old, full of mischief and energy. My wife, Carole, and I had undertaken to contract out the building of our new home, so we had to be here every day. Of course, when you do this, supervise the construction of your home, you have to be involved in everything.

Basil had just dumped off a load of pit run for us when Herschel arrived on the scene. My work gloves lay on the rear tires near us. We chatted and he made out the bill. Carole, fresh from New York City, was shocked you had to pay for "dirt." She thought they would be glad to give it away. Herschel snatched a glove and started to trot off. I yelled at him to stop and tried to get the glove back, but he evaded me easily, and stayed just beyond reach. I summoned Basil to help catch him, but he just bounded away towards home, my glove in his mouth. That was the beginning.

Herschel would show up every morning and scramble up into the house as it was being framed and exercise his jaws on a 2 x 4 chewing it to bits. With a half dozen workmen here, there was a handy supply of treats for Herschel. He would mooch whatever he could, eat whole apples

in a couple of bites, crusts of bread, whatever was available. He tried his best to consume a remnant of insulation once, but choked on it. Quite a character, but friendly, a big grin on his face, tongue hanging out, tail wagging -- you had to love him.

Next came the old rubber boot trick -- one day Herschel got Carole's rubber boot which she had just removed. Our pleas to drop it fell on deaf ears. We had to drive up to Bill and Diane's (his owners) to retrieve the boot from the front yard where he had dropped it moments before. Herschel just grinned and wagged his big thick tail from the protection of his front door. Did I mention that he was a Retriever, a pure-bred Black Lab?

What really entrenched Herschel in our hearts was an incident that even Rin Tin Tin would be hard pressed to top. Carole had roasted a chicken at the cottage and brought it out for lunch. We used our lawn chairs and a square of plywood propped up for a table in the future living room, where Carole had placed the chicken in its tin foil wrap, never thinking it could suddenly disappear.

Lunch time came around and we went in to sit down -- there was no chicken in sight. I remembered seeing Herschel a moment before, so I look here, there and there he was. We had fumbled the play and Herschel took advantage of it. He had stolen the chicken and ran, there were no blockers -- he had an open field -- he was on

the edge of the road next to the shoulder running flat out, it was an easy romp for home, he scored a touchdown. I don't know if Herschel ate it all himself or shared it with Bill and Diane.

As Herschel got older he gradually stopped his puppy pranks and became more skilled, especially at thievery, mooching, being the ladies man and, in general, the dog about town.

One might mistakenly assume Herschel came from the "wrong side of the tracks" -- heavens no -- this is a very respectable, quiet neighbourhood, his master a successful businessman and a well-known sports enthusiast. He had a loving family to care for him and children to play with. But, Herschel was a rebel, he was his "own dog" and adhered to that old adage, GO WEST YOUNG DOG AND SEEK YOUR FAME AND FORTUNE and he did, straight down Broadview to Tudhope Park. With all those campers, he was in food heaven. The word is his popularity was such that he got to ride around in the Park & Rec's half ton truck poised proudly in the front seat.

Of course, there is a price to pay for being famous, apparently he was well known to the local S.P.C.A. dog catcher as well, having been collared more than once, costing Bill a healthy donation each time, to the tidy sum of \$40.00.

If Herschel could sing, I believe his favourite tune would be a take off from the popular old melody, "SHOW ME THE WAY TO GO HOME" and go something like this --

I'll call it the Dog Catcher song:

"Bill, help me to find a way home
I'm tired of running, and I want to rest,
I'm dead

I ate a little garbage about an hour ago
And it's gone right to "His" head
So no matter where I may roam
On land, I'm sure to be known
That old Dog Catcher is after my skin
Bill, I promise, I'll never leave home
again."

One early morning, Carole and I were looking out the front bedroom window -- it faces the road, when out of Frank and Ellen's garage comes Herschel, he was carrying a large bag in his mouth and was heading for home -- Kentucky Fried Chicken. Another prize. The gossip was they had to keep him in on garbage days or there would be nothing left for the truck on the whole street.

Once I witnessed a neighbour up the street chasing Herschel with a broom, he evidently was up to his old tricks again, it was in his blood.

I started a ritual with the dog biscuits -- I'd place one in my hand and put both hands behind my back, switch hands then hold one out, I'd drive him frantic. I also taught him to sit while I threw biscuits allowing him to get them only after I snapped my fingers -- he had it down pat about the third try. Also, hold the biscuit on the nose trick --

he failed more often than not. He gained weight, of course, due to all the calories he consumed and walked with quite a swing and sway. He must have weighed over 100 lbs. He looked like a Black Angus Steer.

Herschel's morning visits to the back door became routine and often he would be waiting for someone to appear in the kitchen. He would sit there, his nose leaving its prints on the glass door as he drooled at the prospect of a dog biscuit and along with it a customary belly rub. Giving Herschel one dog biscuit would be similar to giving a donkey one grain of oats. He hardly even chewed them, just one crunch, one swallow and where's the next? Whenever Carole would pet and fawn over Herschel he would lie down and roll on his backside, his maleness suddenly growing, quite an interesting contrast -- say what -- shocking pink against black velvet.

We would always call our dear old Dog, Champagne (his girlfriend), to come see who was here to visit her. I don't think she could actually see him, but of course could smell him, which half the time wasn't too hard (depending on where he had been last) she would stand and stare straight out, wagging her tail. Herschel would just sit and stare back, his eyes riveted on whomever had the biscuit for him. He would have his head half way through the doorway by the time it was fully opened. Champagne would become real excited, busting to see him, she just loved Herschel, he was the only other Dog she got to socialize with and

she always took full advantage of it. Champy made sure she sniffed Herschel up and down real good and she usually got a big tongue in the face back for it. Herschel seemed to understand that she was very old (17 years in human years), stiffened up with arthritis, had one glass eye, partial sight in the other and near deaf. Herschel always accepted the social graces offered by Champy and never was anything but charming. He was such a rogue.

Herschel loved to go down in our boat slip and muck around up to his back in the water -- he would appear to always be looking for something. Herschel is not what you call a connoisseur, though his tastes varied, ranging from bird feed to chicken bones. He would eat the remains of the cracked corn put out for the Ducks and Muskrats in the dry section of the boat slip. It wasn't as though his master couldn't afford the best dog food money could buy, he was lacking in etiquette, that's all -- Herschel thought an Emily Post was something you pee on.

Herschel would on occasion take aim in anointing the flowers around the big tree, and the birdbath, in effect marking his territory, before passing on through Frank and Ellen's property to Ralph and Doll's old dock. (But, there is one thing I must say, Herschel never left his calling card and thank God for that considering what he may have devoured the day before.) He would do the same before going over to torment Neil and Marg. He had a special affinity for Neil's garage and their

garbage. He would try to give Cliff and Cathy's place the once over but, Cliff being ever watchful, didn't leave Herschel much of an opportunity to increase his caloric intake.

Diane told us in a casual conversation at the end of the driveway one evening, while walking Herschel, that he would actually steal the children's lunches in the morning before they would leave for school and eat them.

As everyone knows, Dogs for some reason or another don't take kindly to postmen, and Herschel was no exception. Being a relatively large Dog his demeanour became all the more frightening. With the hair on his neck standing straight up, he would charge the postie challenging his authority, growling and barking incessantly, all the while strutting in a half circle around him, making a nuisance of himself. This was Herschel's unpleasant side.

Herschel appeared one day all covered in filth and smelled like a dead animal. I proceeded to do my good deed for the day and gave him a bath. I used the garden rake and scratched his back to remove the dirt. He loved it. After I rinsed him off he looked like a champion. He then promptly proceeded to roll in a fresh pile of top soil nearby.

On occasion, we would engage in a good tussle, this he thoroughly enjoyed. After a minute or two, I would have to beg off, as he would become too rambunctious.



I would often pass Herschel on my way home from work at the bottom of our street, a half mile away, nosing his way home, yet it would often be 2 or 3 hours before he would mysteriously emerge from the wooded lots across the street and casually saunter on by. His family would be looking for him, but he never had a care in the world.

Now, Herschel was a real actor, when one of the family walked him -- usually Diane, he would never let on he knew you, he would stick his nose in the air as though to hide the fact from his mistress that he was a roamer and known by everyone.

After a winter he was especially glad to get out and go for a jaunt and see his old buddies down the street. Herschel had the ability to actually grin, his lips would curl back showing his huge white teeth -- quite a sight, he looked fierce (scary if you didn't know he was really happy), a real ham. Now that Tudhope Park is closed to campers, his fresh garbage supply is cut off.

We don't see Herschel much anymore. His family keeps him reigned in (with an invisible fence) and, of course, he's getting on, bless his heart.

I think Herschel may be the reincarnation of ZORRO, or perhaps BILLY THE KID. One of those good old bad guys, or more likely a bad old good guy. I suppose there are individuals who would not share the same sentiments that we have for Herschel.

In the annals of Dog lore, Herschel's escapades are legend and, as for the chicken caper, it rates right up there with the best. One thing is for sure -- Herschel can either brighten your day -- or darken it.

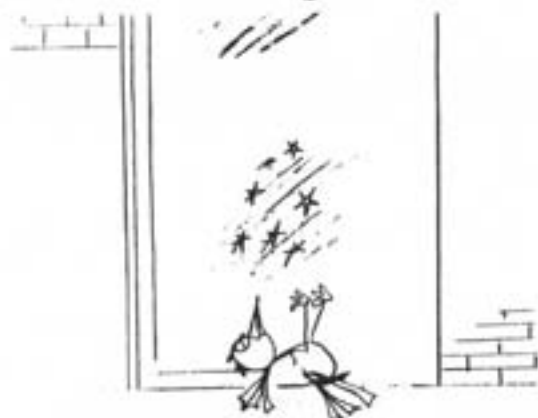
TWO STRIKES AND YOU ARE OUT

On this frosty though sunny winter Sunday morning, with noses in the Sunday Star and one eye on the bird feeder, nice and cozy, we were content to be indoors. Our regular visitors to the feeder, the Finches, Nuthatches and Chickadees, were the most active, with a pair of Doves below on the ground feeding on the seeds dropped from above.

Suddenly, something spooked the Birds and they flew up into the maple tree -- one was not so lucky, it struck the glass patio door with a dull thud. We jumped up and looked out onto the porch and there lay a small Bird on its back. I opened the door and went out into the cold and picked it up, discovering it was a Redpoll, either dead or out cold. No blood from its nose, which would mean the end, so I brought it in. Carole and I did a thorough examination, turning it over and extending its wings and legs, nothing looked broken. Gently laying it in a cardboard box and placing it on the counter away from the Dogs, we hoped it would come around.

With breakfast over, we were anxious to see if the Bird was dead or alive, as we hadn't heard a peep, so I opened the top to peek in.

All of a sudden out burst the Redpoll and flew straight into the glass door which it struck with a thump; down it went, there it lay on the carpet on its back, feet up, eyes closed -- oh no! It was either dead or out cold again.



Picking it up and checking its wings and legs once again, nothing looked broken. We put it back in the box, after showing Champagne, she couldn't see it, but you know, she was family, she sniffed it. I felt sorry for the poor little Bird and we both waited rather anxiously for something to happen. A half hour passed and this time I decided to peek through a crack to see what was up. There looking up at me is a wide-eyed Redpoll, so over to the door we go, open, proceed out onto the porch, open the lid and whoosh -- it's gone. *Why don't you watch where you're going, anyway?*

Come again -- stay longer next time -- you're welcome.

THOSE LONG HOT DOG (FOOD) DAYS OF SUMMER

Things all started innocently enough with a small Raccoon living under the decking on Murray and Sandy's boat slip. The end was open and she would first stick her head out and test the air before emerging every evening just at dusk, worn and weathered looking after a long winter, rather thin, off on her nightly trek to forage for food.

Kevin, the vet, had suggested feeding her dog food rather than the cracked corn we put out in the community feeding station in our boat ramp. So, we did. We took one of those terra cotta saucers that compliment a flower pot and filled it with Champy's dry dog food and put it out on the porch one night to see if it would be of interest to her. Next morning -- gone! Hey, this is pretty good. Fill it up again the next night -- gone. Hokey Cow. Fill it up again, next morning, "What's this?" Food all over the porch, steps, everywhere -- it must have been the wrong brand, or we had a very picky guest.

We tried it again -- only half eaten, the rest all over. Something just didn't seem right. The next morning rising early for work, the answer was on the porch. Mom and four little fur balls -- one sitting in the saucer, swatting dog food pellets out, but not eating them. Two more outside the railing

on the ledge laying down, swatting pellets off onto the deck, they were having a real good time and the fourth was half way up the brick wall beside the window. **Mystery solved** -- it's just Mom trying to wean the babies off her milk.

Cooney, as Carole named her, developed a real healthy appetite, she would cross the neighbours lawn in broad daylight, come up the



steps, onto the porch and look in the patio door for us. We would give her a big bowl of food all to herself. She needed it. Champy would come out on the porch and head down her ramp to do her business, come back up to the door, where we would let her in. Meanwhile, Cooney would hardly blink an eye, just hesitate a second then continue munching away. She would pick it up with both paws and eat like a monkey. When it was gone she would wander back to her den. She loved this set-up. We were delighted.

Like clockwork every evening come dusk, the four babies would follow Cooney out from

under the decking one at a time, scampering at the slightest movement of human interest to the safety of the willow trees that grow at the water's edge.

One bowl wasn't enough so we decided to put out two bowls at night -- one for Mom, one for the babies. They came, they ate, they left. Well, you know the old story, it's hard to keep a good thing secret. By mid-summer, we had the largest gathering of Raccoons to chow down together I have ever heard of -- 3 families, 14 Coons, all at once, eating out of bowls spaced 2 feet apart so they wouldn't kill one another. What a sight! We were now up to seven bowls. And nervy. They came to the door, the window, would stand up, paws to the glass, looking in -- you know, "let's get with it folks, where's the food, you're late, we're hungry, come on - hurry it up. Step to it buddy -- more chow."

Over the course of the summer, we only saw a male Raccoon once, with the females and their babies giving him a wide berth.

By fall we had moved the bowls to the lakeside and had gradually eased off, those coons were sure fat -- between the dog food for the Coons and Dogs and cracked corn for the Muskrats, Ducks and Geese, and birdseed for the Birds, we dished out over 1000 lbs. of goodies that year.

We looked for Cooney in the spring but decided not to repeat the process with Champy going lame and now near totally blind -- we didn't want any altercations.

I suppose she had another family. We would see a Raccoon (family in tow) emerge from the same place under the boat slip and head up the shoreline just at dusk. We will never forget Cooney and her family. She brought us much joy and it still warms our hearts when we remember her.

THE SEA SWALLOWS

Splash -- that's the first thing you will hear, and if you are quick enough, you may see a Tern breaking free of the water with a Fish in its bill. If it was unsuccessful, it will be screeching away like a banshee.



There are three species of Terns that frequent the area. They are the Common Tern -- a grey and white Dove sized Gull-like Bird with red legs and a red and black bill; the Caspian Tern -- a fairly large and sleek sized Gull-like Bird -- with a distinctive black crest, red bill and white and grey body. The Black Tern is a black sooty coloured Gull-like Bird approximately the size of the Common Tern. They are not a common species. We have had two pair, as far as I can determine, here locally for the last three years. They are best

observed in the Narrows -- where they often perch on the water reeds -- and on and around the train bridge.

The Caspian Tern is definitely the most vocal of these species, and also the most fun to watch. Unlike the Herring and Ring-Billed Gulls, the Terns fly with their bills pointing down in their search for food. They are tireless, these avian delights, and do not make a nuisance of themselves as the Gulls can and often do. For sheer entertainment, they rank right up there at the top, for they can wing it with the best of them.

FOR THE LOVE OF CHAMPAGNE

Champagne was part Samoyed and part Spitz, with long golden blonde and white hair, she stood about 18" high, depending on where you measured -- she had quite a sway in her back. Champy was the gentlest, most loving Dog you could ever wish for. She was also Woofie's sister, so to speak, and almost as old.

Champy had cataracts at birth and glaucoma developed in one eye, so Carole had the eye removed and a glass eye put in for a replacement. Her good eye had a cataract and the milky film all but covered it. Funny thing, a film of sorts covered her false eye, so they looked similar.

One winter on Cedar Island, Champagne was out in her little area between the garage and the cottage. The snow from the walk was shovelled up into a small pile and Champy somehow got up on the hill, all of two and a half feet, and couldn't get down. She was just a shaking and howling for us to come get her. We rescued her and brought her in, gave her a hug and she was okay, but she never again dared to venture up on the snow pile.

The little area we called hers was walled in on three sides and fenced on the fourth. Arthur, a big red Retriever, would come visit her, stick his

head over the fence and give her a lick and sniff and stuff. Champy liked him, even if she could hardly see him. Champy got out one day, someone left the gate open and she went for a stroll up the driveway and across the street to where we caught up to her after tearing out of the house in our bare feet. Champy promptly walked directly into a telephone pole in her confusion -- she got a hug and was herded back home to safety. She would walk with her nose just inches off the ground and tight to your legs.

Champagne gradually weakened from arthritis and walked rather stiff-legged, but never gave up. When we moved into the new house our porch was three and a half feet off the ground. So, I built a ramp with cleats on it, sixteen feet long so Champy could get down to do her business. This worked okay up until the time we put steps in, then I had to devise something different. I built an enclosed ramp at the end of the porch that Champy entered through the wrought iron railing that had two removable pickets. It was totally enclosed, so we didn't have to worry about the weather. There was a ramp that went down about two feet on a gentle slope to a landing, then another ramp coming back in the opposite direction only to end up on the ground. It was carpeted with cleats, lined with plywood, shingles to match the house, painted, and Carole had put pin ups of Dogs in it. It served her well for a few years. Champy would come up the ramp and walk to the door and look at it, if she had to wait anymore than a few seconds

she got agitated -- when she wanted in, she wanted in. She would step back a foot or two, put her head in the air and howl, it was beautiful. Just imagine a 90 or 100 year old person doing that, same thing. You could barely hear her, it was so soft.

We would take Champy and Woofie for a walk up the street. We would also end up carrying them back. But, I didn't mind, except Champy was also gaining weight, she now weighed 43 lbs. The winters were the worse; the dog run would get all icy come February or March and Champy was taking longer to get up the ramp, having to stop and rest occasionally. Champy would get fagged out in the ramp and Carole would go down in after her and coax her up.

A lot of things started to happen all at once, I suppose. Woofie was gone now (at 19 years) and Champagne was deteriorating rather quickly, her false eye was starting to bother her so Kevin, the veterinarian, removed it. What a change. Champy never missed the eye, just the discomfort it had caused her the last year. He sewed the lid closed and she was just fine, you could tell, she quit grinding her teeth. She also was having difficulty in getting up off the floor on the marble tile, it was slippery under foot. She didn't like a carpet we put there for her, so we would often have to help her up and rub her legs to get her going in the morning.

Carole had won us a fishing trip to the Yukon, compliments of Tom and the local C.T.S. and we would be gone a couple of weeks. So, I

decided, with Champy's deterioration, that I would build her an elevator to carry her up and down to the dog run. It had to be built fast and I never had a clue, I just went and sat in the garage and looked at what I had -- pieces of steel, leftover wood, and came up with a plan that would replace the ramp, but use the same entrance so she would turn in the same direction coming and going. It took a couple of weeks to build it in my spare time and a friend, Bill, came and put in two weekends to help with the electrics. It operated off a fiber-optic eye for the control and got her down in 4 seconds. She didn't bat an eye, just got on board and away she went, got stranded in there once when I wasn't home, but survived the ordeal. The elevator gave her a new lease on life, if only for a while.

By now, old Champy's eyesight was almost completely gone. I would sit at the counter and hold down a treat off my plate for her and she would walk on by and stare at the TV, which would be off, and wag her tail.

We also built a ramp into the living room for her because of the two steps down. Now she would come racing down and head right for the candy bowl -- M&M's -- Carole would give her one or two every day, along with a brushing and many hugs and kisses.

Graham looked after Champagne once a month, grooming her and all; he would even pick her up at the house. Graham understood the bond we had with her and always made her look beautiful.

Champy, of course, was in most every picture we took, she was such a darling.



As fall came, old Champ took to sleeping a lot and I knew it wouldn't be long before she passed on. She was now 17. It was a real problem for her to get up on her feet and come November we had the dirty weather that is typical for that time of year. She would go down in the elevator but wouldn't want to go out, we had to watch her, lest she fell and couldn't get up. I took to carrying her in my arms down the steps and putting her in the run, then carrying her back up. Champagne had just enough left to lick your hand or face when Carole would comb her or feed her or when I would carry her to and fro.

We made a decision on a day it was freezing rain outside and Champy couldn't get up. A call to Kevin was made and a half hour later we were there in the back room of the Veterinary Clinic. It was really very peaceful. Kevin gave her a shot and Champy licked his hand, then Carole hugged her till she was gone. Carole rode in the back seat holding old Champy on our way home. Burying her was not a problem as things were prepared. I had put a box in the ground for just such a time two years earlier. We wrapped her up and put her in the box with tears streaming down our faces, and the rain soaking us through. I covered her with sand and back filled over with the earth I'd removed.

Champagne lies beside Woofie now and her plaque is there on the planter. She also gets her M&M's on this anniversary every year. We leave them out there for her, and the next day they are always gone. She will live in Carole's heart and mine, forever.

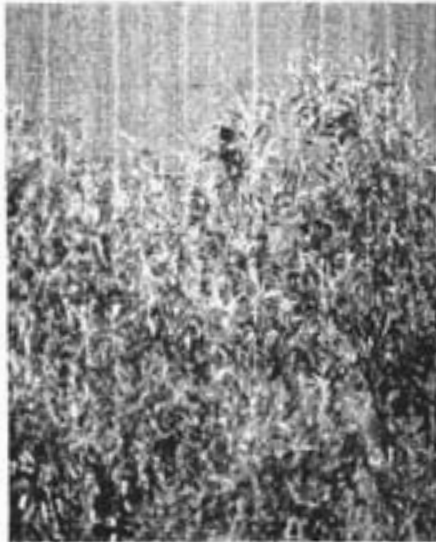
ROGERS FINE, BUT GEORGE WILL DO

With my increasing passion for the fine sport of observing our fine feathered friends, I have discovered I believe a code, more or less, that must be adhered to in order to verify a questionable species, one not normally seen in the area, etc. The procedure being this specimen has to be verified by at least two other birders who definitely know what they're looking at. O.K. Fine. I'll just request the next superstar to relax while I make the necessary arrangements to have Roger Tory Peterson himself flown in.

But, there is another way, isn't there? Call upon George Eastman. You know, photographing Birds presents quite a challenge. You eye up a specimen in your view finder and it looks just gorgeous -- big -- beautiful colour, the whole composition is perfect, you have made it -- the shot of the century -- just one problem, your lens (mine being 210 mm) is realistically only good enough for taking a picture of say, your fingers.

One day while out in the yard, I see this brilliant flash of colour. Hokey cow! Quick, run, grab the camera and start shooting -- this is a first for me and maybe a first this side of Winnipeg (how naive). Auto mode allowed me to blaze away, I didn't hesitate, it may not wait.

Fantastic, six decent frames, a minute or two and its gone.



When I first went through the pictures that I got back from John at Calvacade, I thought he made a mistake. John must have given me someone else's film -- had to -- my Bird pictures would have filled the frame, but wait, there it was, right on top of the tree where I filmed it. Maybe I got the lens on backwards somehow. My heart sank, no one would believe this -- let alone be able to identify it, yet it did have considerable mass for a large insect. Then it hit me, while taking the pictures I remembered a loud buzzing in my ears, I thought I was taking a shot of a Yellow-Headed Blackbird -- but maybe it wasn't, not at all, it was probably a giant colossal Bumble Bee, the biggest ever seen and I have pictures to prove it.

BUCKY AND THE AXE LADY

Generations of Beavers must have used the den out under our big willow tree at the lake. I accidentally broke through the roof a couple of years ago while working on the sprinkler system and was able to put a flashlight down and take a look around. Tunnels ran in every direction and the den areas seemed huge, with a small accumulation of limbs devoid of bark remaining. Quite comfy when stacked with fresh saplings for the winter, I imagine. Which reminds me of a particular Beaver who was "in residence" about six years ago. Bucky would come up on land, usually at night and fell small trees, then drag them back to it's den. This usually happened in the late fall, October, November and sometimes December. This particular year must have been unusually hard on the Beaver as it was removing many small trees up and down the shoreline.

Bucky ventured up to Murray and Sandy's front yard one night and helped itself to one of the three birches they had planted. Murray wasn't impressed. He vowed revenge should it ever happen again.

All this was rather fascinating to Carole, who never had this close a contact with one of mother natures living teeth machines before. Especially one who must have been some hungry because Bucky would come up the empty lot

between our house and Murray and Sandy's and drag the trees back even in daylight, and there were dogs about -- Pepper, Sandy's Kerry Blue and Herschel for another. I was worried they might come face to face and Herschel go on the offensive snapping and snarling, harassing the Beaver. Luckily, nothing ever happened.

Weeks pass and then one afternoon Carole watches the Beaver make three consecutive trips up the lot towards Murray and Sandy's front yard, but each time returning without a meal. Carole is taking this all in and, feeling rather benevolent, she decided to lend a hand.

Crossing the street to where there was an abundance of small trees (where Paul and Carolyn now live), Carole, using a small axe, chops one down.



Dragging the tree back across the street and down to the lake she then poked the tree in the open hole in the ice that the Beaver was using right next to our breakwall. There it lay, half on its side, all six feet of it. Going back into the house Carole went up to the bedroom to have a better view due to the angle and waited for something to happen. After about an hour, the tree started to move. Just a little at first, then slowly it started down. Bucky was under the ice tugging away, it didn't take long, maybe ten minutes at most, and the tree was out of view and completely under the ice. Bucky dragged it around to Frank and Ellen's side of the breakwall, where the main entrance to the den was located. Carole was very happy the tree was the right flavour.

I'm amused by all this and I think this was a decent thing for her to do. A little unusual, but decent anyways. Hopefully, this act of benevolence also prevented a conflict with Murray snapping and snarling and harassing the Beaver. Besides, it would have been hard on his hands and knees.

Winter settled in right after and we didn't see Bucky or signs of it until spring when hunger once again necessitated a journey up the lawn for a snack. Over the next year the lot next door sold and a breakwall was installed restricting the Beaver's access, to a degree. Our sloping boat slip was, however, tailor made for Bucky. The Beaver would be most active in summer, especially early morning or in the evening and we would watch it

swimming back and forth through the water and occasionally coming up on land by the willows between the lot next door and new homeowners, Dale and Diane (Bucky, having driven out Murray and Sandy six months earlier -- just kidding).

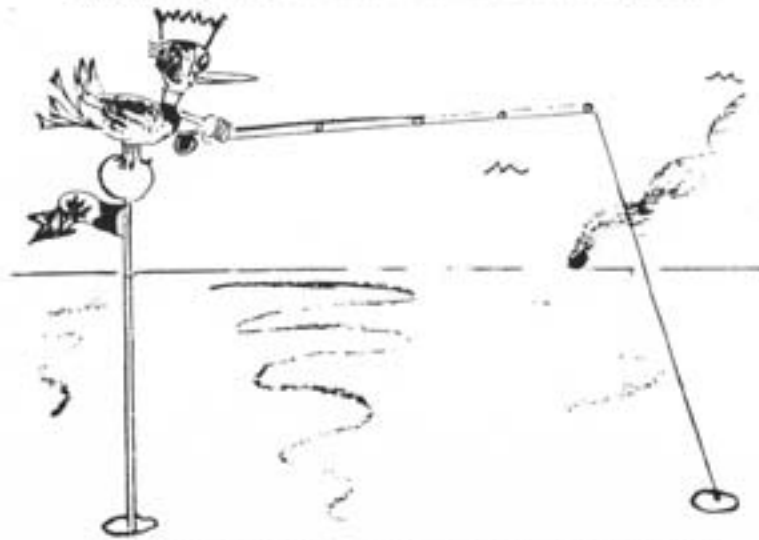
Of the six lilacs we had originally planted, we had one left. The others died from various reasons. This one specimen was about 4 feet tall with a healthy trunk and sturdy branches and was producing beautiful blue flowers. With a heavy snow fall the following winter and an empty stomach, snow or no snow, and a lilac or not, Bucky had paid us a visit though we never found out till the snow started melting in the spring. Bucky had chewed the main limb off the lilac, completely ruining it. Also, it had chewed halfway through our prized sunburst locust which was close by, but must have been just teasing us as the tree was still standing and has since recovered, its huge wound gradually growing over, but otherwise, no worse for wear.

Una up beside Cliff and Cathy wasn't so lucky. Bucky took out a number of established trees. Peter the postman and trapper was, I believe, summoned to trap it. Apparently, it was starving and was only half the normal body size. We have had other Beavers take up the den, but I suppose with the boat traffic and seadoos, it is not as safe a home as it once was, which is sad. Whenever there is an urban conflict with man, the wildlife are bound to lose.

I didn't really mind the lilac and the locust tree. Bucky was here first -- just being a Beaver. After all, Bucky had to eat too, and the last time I looked, it didn't carry an axe.

THE KINGFISHER'S KINGDOM

Sitting up there on top of Ralph's flagpole the Kingfisher can see every little Fish that might swim close enough to the surface for it to capture. Launching itself down to pick up momentum it will swoop back up, then down again, in an undulating fashion until it reaches its next perch.



A lot of fishing appears to be done from a limb that hangs out over the water from Dale and Diane's willow tree. The water under the tree is shaded so the Fish would be at a disadvantage to start with, without the sharp eye of the Kingfisher to contend with. I have often seen the Kingfisher make numerous dives into the water and return to its perch with a Minnow in its bill. A big oak tree

on the north side of Monica's is one of its favourite lookout spots. The other end of its range in my view appears to be the large tree at Cliff and Cathy's waterfront.

This past summer there were two Kingfishers -- a pair I imagine, working the shoreline here. One thing, I have never seen is a baby Kingfisher. They are fun to watch, especially when they are flying along, then dive head first into the water after a meal. They are quick to exit, flying up into the trees if they are successful, eager to consume their catch. Their call is a distinctive -- rattle -- and can be readily recognized, as well the Bird itself -- a dark blue grey with a white band around its neck and a jagged crest on its head and a very long bill. They are a great community Bird and bother no one, but do help cull the weak and ailing Fish from the water -- doing their part to keep the environment clean, I suppose -- but entirely for their own survival.

THE WITNESS

On numerous occasions, Carole and I have been sitting in the house or on the porch and watched a Tern dive into the water and pluck out a small Fish -- or Minnow. Now, I suppose most people who live here on the east side of the Point have also watched the same thing many times. But, there is one Bird aside from the Kingfisher who follows suit -- that puts on a real dramatic performance should you by chance happen to be watching. Ospreys, only one species world-wide, are common visitors to our little bay.

My first acquaintance with this Fish Hawk came during the construction of our house in October of 1986. The brick layer called out to me one day, "look at the large Bird in the willow by the lake." Low and behold it was an Osprey -- the first I had ever laid eyes on. Well, it was there most days for two weeks, perching on a large limb over the water, it being easy to observe with its black and white markings and tree bare of leaves. Oh, for a decent telephoto lens.

I've watched them come every year since, alone or in pairs, to fish here in the bay, sometimes being successful and sometimes naught. Visiting friends have also been treated to the Osprey's aerial displays and power dives into the water and to rise with a Fish for its effort. They will then fly eastward. I've photographed their babies in the

nest east of here, and nearly everyone has seen the nest on the hydro pole, east of Uptergrove. Wonderful Birds and adoring parents -- they work their feathers off while raising their young.



Friends often ask, "have you got a picture of one with a Fish?" and I can say, "yes, I do." I took it three years ago just after Neil and Frank brought their new canoes home here to the lee side. It was probably a Sunday morning, since Frank was home and not working, the sun was up and the water was like glass. A fog which had settled during the night was starting to lift -- it was just 6 a.m. Frank had put the canoe in the water being careful not to interrupt the calm and serenity that clothed the bay. As he moved away from the dock, his paddle silently propelled the canoe forward, the gentle ripples penetrating the weeds, he all but disappeared into the fog.

Meanwhile, I was framing this classic canoeist in my view finder -- my actions unknown to Frank. Now, the sun was burning the fog off rather rapidly and, from my viewpoint on the porch, I was waiting for Frank to turn the canoe around for another shot when, out of the fog, just above and behind him, the Osprey appeared -- hovering in the air, as they do so well, wings beating rapidly. Realizing what was about to happen, I raised my camera -- hoping Frank would turn around in time. The Osprey dove -- it hit the water feet first and completely disappeared -- remaining under water for scant seconds -- only to emerge with a large Fish in its talons.

Frank never knew -- the remaining fog, I suppose, deadened the sound. It was Mother Nature's finest hour and I framed it perfectly, and as always, the Osprey flew east.

THOSE DILLY, DALLY, DAFFY DUCKS

Spring and the break-up of rotting ice signals the arrival of the Fish Ducks, on their annual migration to the breeding grounds far to the north. These first arrivals are the Common Mergansers, Goldeneyes, Buffleheads, Scoup, and the smaller, beautiful Hooded Mergansers. The Common Mergansers arrive in large numbers, their striking, large, black and white bodies, and orange/red bills of the males is quite a sight. The females, a more subdued grey, but with their rakish rusty red heads, are none the less quite attractive.

A tight group of Goldeneyes is always a pleasant sight, their black and white contrast pleasing to the eye as well. Nature dictates the female species be as inconspicuous as possible to ensure the chain of survival.

The Hooded Merganser is picture perfect, but very wary and extremely hard to get close enough for a real close-up photograph with all but a powerful telephoto lens in the four to six hundred class. As the ice melts, small pockets of open water appear, close to shore and this is where you will observe them best, diving for Minnows in one opening, only to appear a short distance away in another. They are constantly diving for food,

only occasionally leaving the water to preen their feathers and doze on the ices edge. They normally all move out to the channel come night fall -- returning to the inshore pools in the morning.

Migrant Blacks and Mallards follow the Fish Ducks north. I have only observed Blacks close to shore here in the bay on a few occasions and then very briefly.

The Buffleheads and Goldeneyes are becoming more frequent in the open water pools as they are greater in number overall.

The occasional lone Old Squaw and Scaup will appear for hours, perhaps a day or two at the most, then they are gone. I refer to inshore here in our little bay -- the channel will harbour these for a few weeks or more.

The Mallards, of course, are the mainstay of the local waterfowl Duck population. There is an interesting observation to make here. The male Ducks will all hang out together, in general, and likewise the females, especially after the broods are raised. I in no way imply this is the rule, exceptions are natural.

Nothing warms the heart like the sight of a mother Mallard and her brood of Ducklings, all fuzzy with down, paddling along all in a row, one or two occasionally lagging behind only to suddenly dart ahead to catch up. Female Mallards will, on occasion, adopt another's brood should they be abandoned. I have pictures of a mother with twenty six Ducklings in which appeared to be two or three stages of growth. What a commotion

when we fed them in the boat slip.

Young Ducks, in particular, seem to have a penchant for Bees. They will raise themselves up out of the water, necks outreached as far as they can and leap up to crush the Bees in their beaks. The Mallards, like the Geese, all dunk for their greens -- arses up.

Four years ago we had a female Mallard with a deformed bill visit us. She could not pick up food off the ground as the top half went one way and the bottom the other. I supposed she did okay in the water as she was near full grown. The Ducks would trek up the lawn, all in a row, nearly a dozen, who when seeing us appear on the deck, would all start running for the cracked corn. Right up on the deck they came, a couple venturing up the steps, eager to get their share. They wouldn't leave until all the corn was gone.

The Mallards are very frightened of Mink. When a male or mother and babies are swimming, the Ducks will sound an alarm, quacking wildly, they will gang up and follow the Mink at a safe distance until they leave the water.

The Ducks, I'm sure, laugh at us -- yes laugh, you can hear them, it usually starts with one here then another and another over there. They also seem to laugh at just the right time, just when something pertinent has been said, something that isn't funny. They really get into their laughing fits in the autumn -- maybe because they know winter is on its way and they are leaving for warmer climates and most of us are staying behind.



Come fall, the northern Ducks are back -- with huge flocks resting on Lake Couchiching for a few days or more. I observed a huge flock of Common Mergansers off Barnfield Point -- males every last one -- they were hugging the shore line. They appeared to be covering a school of Minnows. Flocks of four to five thousand Goldeneyes are not uncommon.

Over a three day weekend starting on a Friday last fall, just as the main body of water was frozen over, the channel still clear, provided a resting place for approximately four thousand Common Mergansers -- mostly males. This count dropped to twenty five hundred to three thousand on the Saturday as some left, and down to fifteen hundred on the Sunday. By Monday, there wasn't a Duck left.

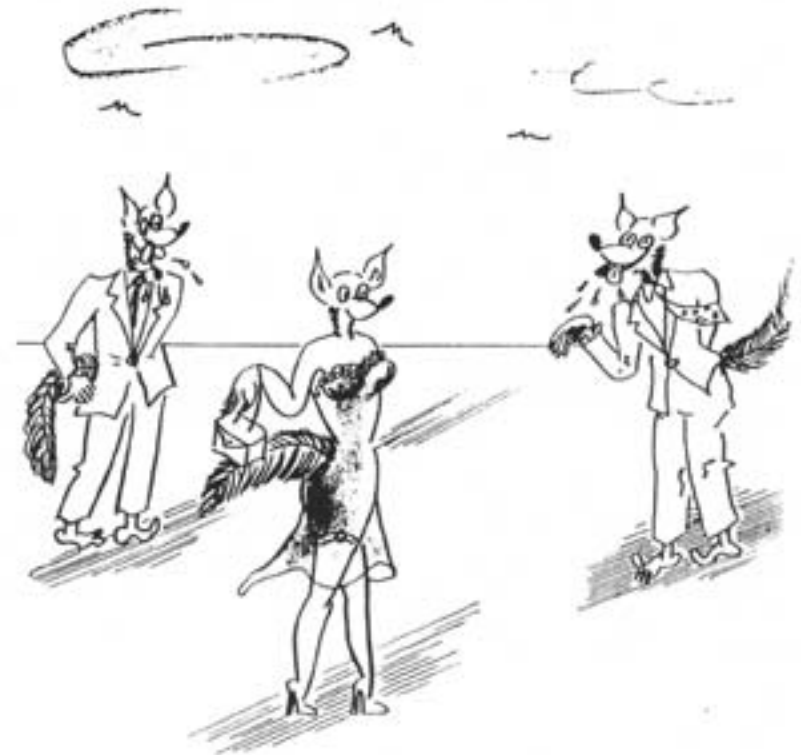
The local Mallards will hang on to the bitter end with their buddies the resident Geese. Then, suddenly, they are gone for another season. Spring will start the cycle over again as it has for eons and -- possibly next year -- I will get a picture of a Hooded Merganser.

THE NOT SO READY FOX

Looking out onto the ice early one winter morning in the month of March, we were surprised to see a Red Fox -- resplendent in its beautiful winter coat and huge bushy tail, which made it appear out of proportion. This particular Fox was on to something as it was following a scent at a meandering, though fast pace. It was heading up the lake towards the point about two hundred feet off shore and momentarily disappeared out of view behind the cedar hedge. When we saw it again, it was a good five hundred feet off shore heading for the channel where a dark blue line indicated open water. To our surprise, this turned out to be a different Fox, as the first one came into view some distance behind, and was now following the leader. A moment later a third Fox appeared.

With all three now in view, it became apparent what was happening. The Fox that we saw first was a male following a female in season, having picked up her scent. The third Fox to appear was also a male looking for some company. We watched the three of them, stopping ever so often, and skirting the open water by a safe distance make their way over to the far shore. The female would sit and stare at her two suitors who would be now a couple of hundred feet from her, one to either side. Breeding season brings on some rather unusual (to us) behaviour. The two

males would gradually work their way closer to the female who didn't seem to be turned on just yet. The males never appeared aggressive towards one another, just wishing the other guy would get lost, I suppose. All three would move as one, they gradually moved fairly close to shore and the female, after an hour and a half of this playing around, suddenly loped off into the woods. The two males, doing the "fox trot" (what else) followed, and disappeared through an opening in the trees to the seclusion of the forest. This was the last time we saw them, for within a week there was open water all the way to Nadie Island.



THE CARDINAL SIN

Fishing, it can be relaxing, or hairy, much like golf, if you let it get to you on an off day. Did you ever catch Fish, at least something pretty well, every time you went out, then a friend comes along to visit, you go out today, tomorrow, next day, the next -- not a Fish, not even a nibble -- nothing? It's down right embarrassing. You go through the -- "hey, no problem -- we'll get them the next time - don't worry about it. We had a good time, that's the main thing." Everyone who goes out fishing wants to catch Fish or they wouldn't be fishing. Your friend leaves, out you go, fifteen minutes you have a Fish. You don't even want to tell him.

Every fisherman knows there are certain rules of etiquette you abide by when fishing together in a boat. Suppose I'm in the front and you're in the back and you catch a Fish. I don't run to the back of the boat and start flailing away, you just don't do that -- right? -- right? There's another rule, you don't throw your line over mine and get our lines tangled, at least, not on purpose, if I'm catching more Fish than you. But, there is one rule. One rule that is above all others -- one rule, never to be broken -- never. Let me tell you.

Frank Pugliese is a friend and companion of Jean (Carole's Mom). Frank (the discoverer of the Franklin Egg) comes up every year for a week or two and on the weekends we go fishing.

Well, Carole and I had been getting the Pike pretty good (this year in particular between us we caught twenty two, kept a few, the rest went back in). Frank arrives and before long we get around to talking about fishing. We're going out the next day to knock their socks off.

Well, as usual, things go dead when Frank arrives -- all the Fish leave all the lakes for where, I don't know -- but they do, believe me. With this one exception. We headed out this morning working a few favourite spots, but had no luck. I was getting desperate, this drought had gone on long enough. It was time to pull all the tricks out of the bag and even let Frank use my favourite lure. After literally years of not catching a real Fish, he is going to go nuts when he finally does. Well, that's exactly what happened.

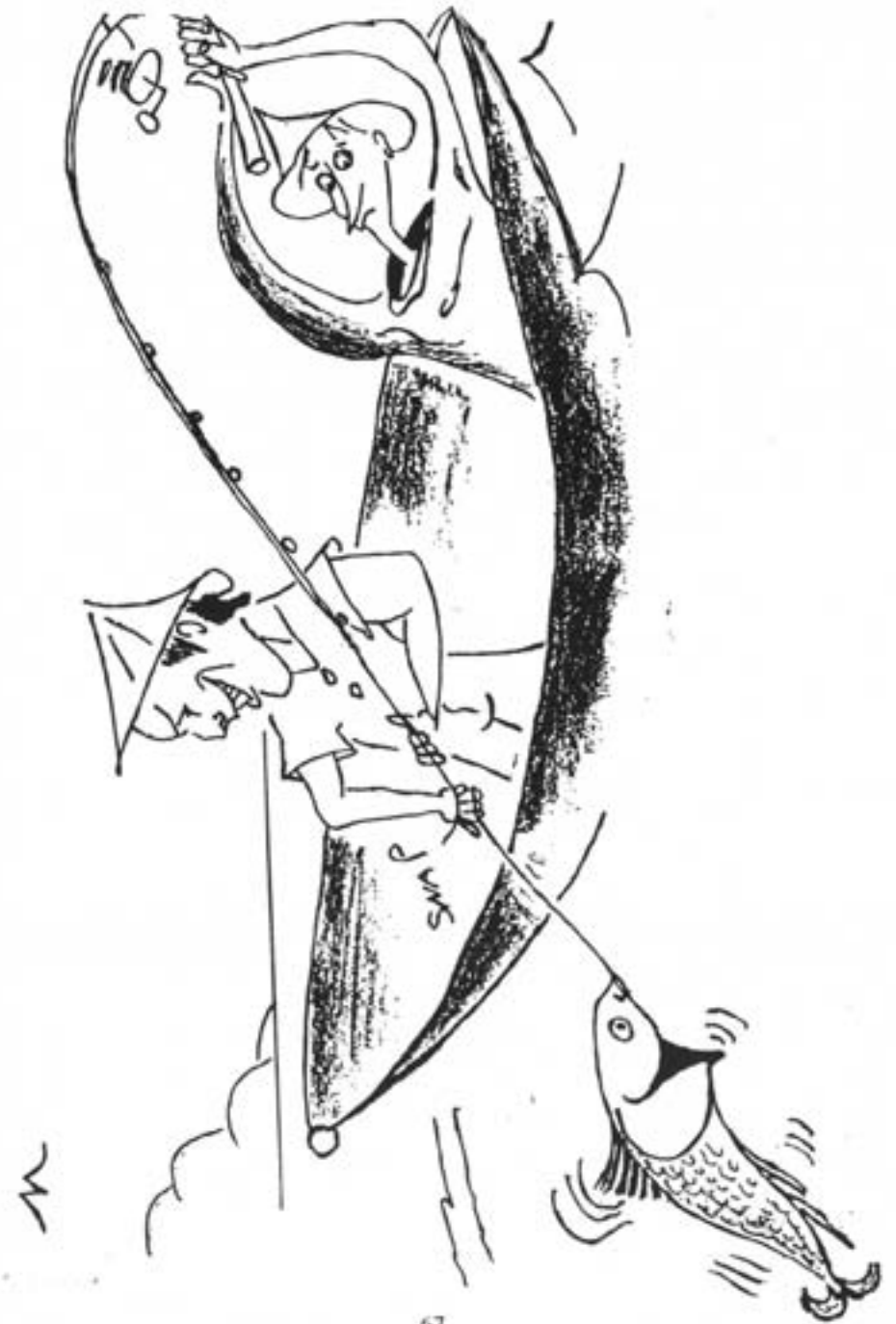
We were off of Big Chiefs Island in the south bay about 14' of water, just where the current cuts around to go between Horseshoe -- getting close to the approaching weeds when it hit -- hard. Frank nearly had a fit, I nearly had the big one. Frank went nuts. He started jerking on the rod like crazy and reeling fast, screaming, "come on baby, I got you now," just a hauling on the rod. If he ever got the Fish to the surface and the line held, he would have shot it right over the boat.

I tried to settle him down even to the point I let go the wheel and grabbed his shoulders to try and calm him, but the Fish was running fast under the boat and the rod was bent in a dangerous arc.

There is aluminum trim that runs around the gunnels of the boat and across the transom – the unthinkable happened, the line got caught by the corner and held fast, jammed, or so I thought.

The Fish, I knew, was off the other side of the boat somewhere and Frank wasn't giving up, this was "the" Fish. The boat was now in the weeds, the Fish having turned it 90°, either the rod was going to break under the strain, or the line and the Fish were going to part company. I had to do something quickly – I made my move – which I will never forget – neither will Frank – I, me, Larry, committed "The Cardinal Sin" – **I touched the line.**

Off it went, the sharp crack of line breaking was – well – heart breaking and the rod bucked back in Frank's hands and the biggest, meanest Fish that ever was, swam free. I have tried many times on numerous occasions to get Frank a Fish, but no luck, just as well – if he caught one, no matter how big, it still wouldn't be as big as the one that got away.



THE GREAT DUCK/MUSKRAT FIGHT

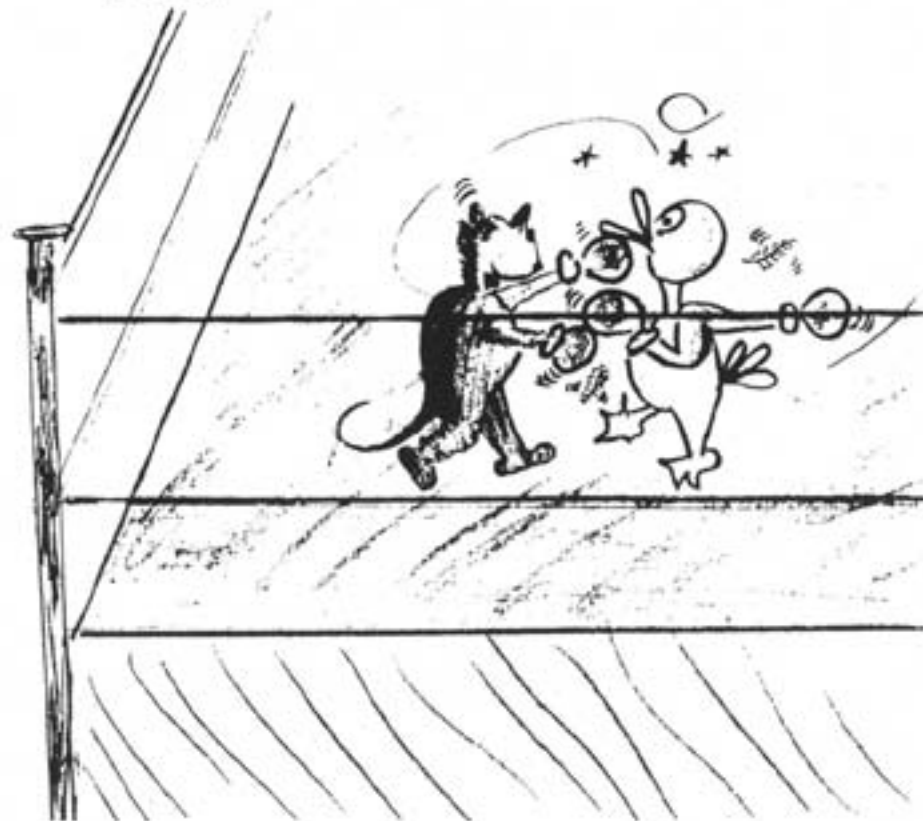
Mothers the world over are all the same no matter what the species, when junior is hungry, Mom has to produce. No exception. I never expected to witness just how demanding a job this would be when I sat in our boat slip with my camera attempting to capture on film what I hoped would be the perfect picture of the baby Muskrats feeding on the cracked corn we had put down. There were three babies along with their Mother who would stick their heads out from under the wall of the slip, look around, then dart out and fill their faces.

In any case, they were either oblivious to my presence, or hunger took precedence. I clicked away at my leisure.

This situation was about to change dramatically with a Mother Mallard and her brood appearing on the scene, paddling vigorously towards the incline where the Muskrats were feeding. She wanted her fair share of the corn. There really was enough for all of them but, who knows why, she challenged the Muskrat -- who I suppose wasn't in the sharing frame of mind herself, since it was a case of first there, first served. It was attack and counter-attack -- the Muskrat leaping and hissing and the Mallard quacking and beating her wings. Jab, thrust, feint,

slash, teeth gnashing, feather's flying, a dive for the throat, a left hook, an upper cut, a karate kick. They went around and around. Then "rat a tat tat" the Mallard's bill went on the Muskrats head -- "Zowie." Enough, the Muskrat and family headed for cover, first under the siding, then to open water.

Mrs. Big and family, quacking victoriously, proceeded to consume every particle of corn left on the ramp. And yours truly recorded this for posterity.



FRENZIES AND FRANTICS

The first bird feeder I built was seven feet long, fourteen inches wide, twenty inches high and weighed around eighty five pounds, held a fifty pound bag of mixed seed, plus twenty pounds of sunflower seeds. It took two people to hang it every year -- it hung from a steel tubular framework and had a matching shingled roof -- the same as the house.

On the bird feeder most mornings you would find up to seven Black Squirrels all fighting for the feed, mostly sunflower seeds, and an occasional peanut from the mixed seed. They can sure put on a performance. The antics they go through to get seed out of a feeder is at times hilarious.

They are the same as the Birds in the birdbath -- fight like the dickens to keep it all to themselves. They would be on the roof, the frame, the fence, in the feeder, all over. If they had a little discipline they could have all lined up like Pigs at the trough, a good two dozen at a time.

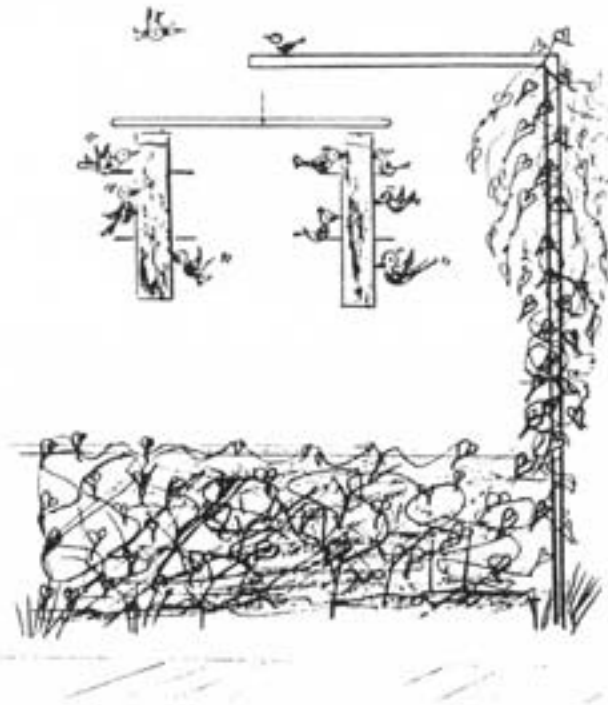
One thing though, due to their antics, etc. enough seed would fall to the ground where Chippy (the Chipmunk) could get it, along with the Mourning Doves. The Birds themselves always had enough room to share without fighting, it seemed to serve the small Birds best as they would be in there in good numbers. The Rock

Doves also found it attractive and laid claim to their fair share as well. A feeder of this size is actually ideal for a more country setting than here in the city with limited space. I wouldn't hesitate to have another, however. This one was passed on to Terry and Kate out in the country.

Other variations followed. I was never content to just have a normal single hanging feeder, there wasn't enough action. A carousel type of feeder was next -- laid out like a wheel with silos at the end of the spokes. The small Birds -- House Finches, Gold Finches, Nuthatches, Chickadees, Bluejays, Cardinals, all came to feed singularly or in groups. They are a joy to watch and they always brighten up a nasty winter morning.

The next step in the progression of my bird feeder method was a bank of silo feeders all in a row that hung from two rods off the header of the porch -- this brought them up real close and gave the small Birds a less rowdy place to feed, except for one thing, this was ideal. The seed they spilled made one heck of a mess on the porch and the poop didn't exactly please us either. The Squirrels loved it, so easy to get to, they could sit right there and eat away to their hearts content. The five silos often had a Bird on all the openings. Then last winter came and the Birds went -- to where I don't know -- but they dropped off and have not come back in numbers like they were four or five years ago.

Next came a single six sided single silo feeder that swivels out over the lawn for the Birds and Squirrels to feed on, then rotates back around to the deck so I can fill it. There is a particular grey phase Black Squirrel that comes to feed occasionally. Once the weather warms, I'm sure it will be back.



We have a new visitor to our home this year, an immature Red Squirrel. It comes up onto the porch and sends Tessie (the latest addition to our family -- a beautiful Bichon Frise) into a tizzy.

It appears too small to make it up the bird feeder pole and sit on the silo ledge where the seeds are. This is the first Red Squirrel I have seen on this side of the Point in the nine years we have been here.

The other visitor that benefits from the overspill is our little friend, Chippy, the Chipmunk. He scurries about around the edges of the deck driving Tessie crazy. I often give him a tin of nuts all to himself, hiding it out of view of the Squirrels. He carts them away to his sanctuary in a couple of hours. Chippy comes into the garage and loads up on the seed and with his cheeks bulging would slip out of sight behind the workbench. I could never figure out where his stash was, until I went to put my rubber boots on one day and the toe was stuffed full. It was only moved about ten feet from where the bags of seed were. I caught him red-handed in the sunflower seeds one day and was able to take his picture. The Cat up the street used to come down hunting for Chippy and family, so I caught it one day and took it to the owner's house and explained to them what the Cat was up to. They apologized and the next time I saw it a bell was on its collar. The Cat eventually gave up, as I don't see if any more and Chippy and family are still here.

This winter we had an all time record for Mourning Doves, thirty three at one time, though only six to eight appear regularly.

The spring is always a good time for the feeder as the Gold Finches put on their yellow

coats and a greater variety of Birds venture back to feed from the silos.

Even the Mice take a liking to the seed that escapes the Birds. In the spring melt you will find small runways in the snow and small deposits of seed husks here and there, indicating they weren't idle through the cold winter.

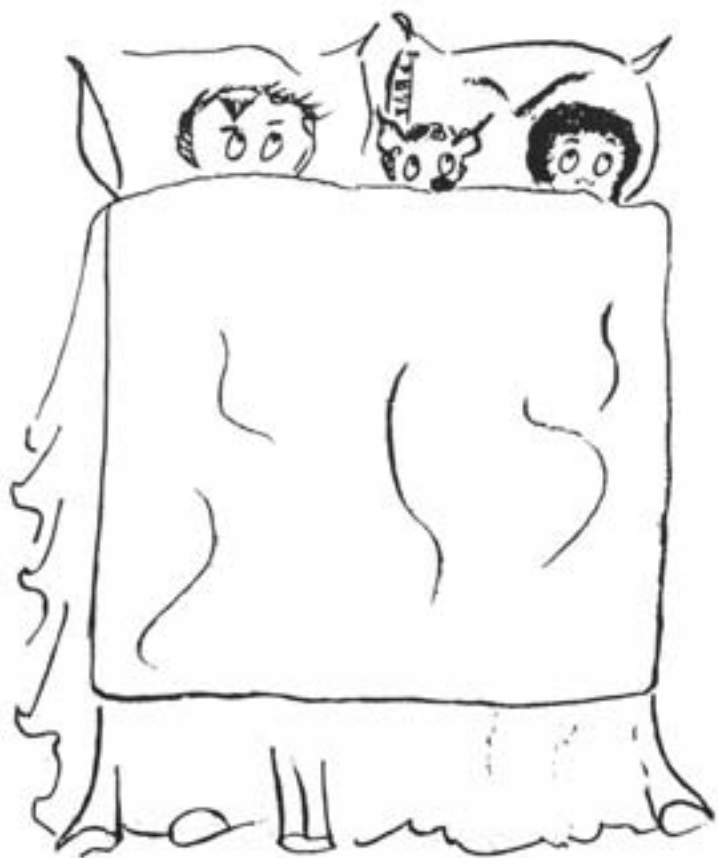
The feeders have brought us many, many hours of enjoyment for ourselves, family and company, as well as the Redpoll. He wasn't inclined to stay long. You look forward to seeing the activity every day and you miss them when the Birds and Squirrels don't show up. Well, for some people only the Birds, but what the heck -- we feed them all.

BATTY OVER YOU

There are often rather inconspicuous members of the world of nature all around us, yet we hardly ever have contact with them. Oh, we see the Bats flitting about come dusk and on occasion see one during the day, probably by disturbing its sleep, but we rarely observe them in the sense we do other obvious and friendlier creatures.

The Bats like the corners of our front porch above the door. They leave their droppings, so I know when they have been there. Every once in a while I put the hose on the wall and occasionally scrub the concrete with a brush and soap, but no big deal.

It so happened we had a late visit by my brother, Peter, one night and I suppose while we stood at the door, saying good night, a Bat slipped in unnoticed. Around 2 a.m. I was awakened by this strange noise. A Bat was flying low over our heads. Turning on the light it left the room and went downstairs with me in pursuit. Carole was not too happy with our fuzzy little visitor. After chasing it back upstairs (it didn't want to leave by the now open door), I finally got it trapped in the guest bedroom by closing the door after it entered. It was just a simple matter then of turning off the light, ducking every second or two, opening the window, and then it was gone.



Bats consume many Insects, I'm told, nature's own Mosquito control. That old wives tale about Bats in your hair is just that, a tale. I have many friends who can attest to this fact -- Reed, Lorne, Tom, Bill, Malcolm, Aubrey and Marvin. They know a lot about hair, or rather, the lack of it.

ARSSES UP

Geese are the first waterfowl I see in the spring before break-up. I will spot a dark clump out there on the edge of the ice in the channel and sure enough, its a Goose. They are very hardy waterfowl. The most beautiful sound to strike my ears in the early spring is a pair of honking Geese that fly in low over the ice announcing their arrival as they head for Wally's front yard. They will land on the ice a couple of hundred yards off shore and walk in. They do this the first few times, then fly directly to land.

There's often over sixty Geese here by late spring, then the majority move out, flying north for the breeding season and not returning until the fall, thus leaving the local resident population.

This spring there were five breeding pairs that raised families, one family of eight, one of six, two of five and one of three. Its always a thrill to see the new babies, yellowish down covering their awkward bodies when their parents venture out with them for the first time.

The families will all travel together after entering the water -- one family after another and proceed like a small armada up the shoreline. The families and the loners (two distinct groups) give one another adequate room when passing through, the non-family groups in the flock usually giving way.

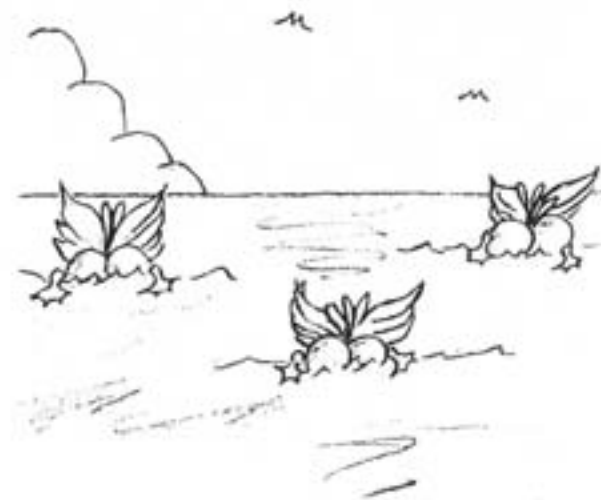
As the young goslings progress, their parents take them on jaunts across the waterfront properties from down at Cliff and Cathy's right up to Dale and Diane's. They stomp across eating their way through everything in sight. They will eat most anything, but prefer the young tender grass, if they are on your lawn for anything more than a few minutes, you can expect them to leave a deposit behind, which isn't exactly appreciated.

Cliff and Cathy quite often put the run on them and you hear the family next door to Wally out chasing them off. I am trying to train our little dog, Tessie, to keep them on the move. She is willing as long as I am there to back her up. Being only half their size, I'm sure she is just a little intimidated.

The Toronto Star ran an article recently that stated there are over three hundred and fifty thousand Geese in southern Ontario. The reason we have the Geese we do here in the bay can be partially contributed to those of us who at present and in the past have adhered to the practice of feeding them -- even though we personally ceased this ritual some three years ago. Some of us still feed the Geese. Some among us feed the Geese buckets of corn every day. This is no longer an acceptable practice to most people. We have often fed the Geese by hand at the water's edge with their plastic like beaks skillfully plucking bread from our fingers.

Fall is the time I enjoy the Geese the most, when the water is low. It is necessary for the

Geese to get themselves in a rather comical and compromising position in order to feed on the small bottom plants. They do this by turning upside down, their head and necks straight down paddling away to keep upright and their arsses up, pointing skyward.



There are ninety-seven Geese out front in three different groups. They're starting to flock now for the annual migration. I've already seen two big flocks going south, and the local Geese are making daily trips to the corn fields for leftovers.

You can expect to be awakened most mornings by the sound of gun fire at day break

during the fall hunting period -- especially the opening two weeks. Every fall the local hunters set up their blinds on the far shore, as well as Nadie Island and take a good number of Geese and Ducks. Not long after the shooting starts the Geese will hug the shoreline of our small bay -- usually the migrants coming through fall victim to the hunters. As the bay freezes over, the Geese move out to the channel, a few rather stubborn ones will hang on to the bitter end. Then, as the ice covers the channel once again, the Geese finally leave for their winter habitat.

OH, RALPH -- GIZZARD?

Now, those of you who know Ralph know I'm not kidding when I say Ralph has a strong voice, maybe even stronger than strong, whatever that is. As a matter of fact, Doll is no slouch either.

Ralph told me a number of year ago, down in King, their Parrot -- Gizzard -- got loose and went for a little jaunt, flying over hill and dale, meadow and woodland. Ralph, it seems, (if I got this correctly) spied Gizzard way down the end of this field (or maybe he heard Gizzard squawking) a good quarter mile away and lets go with a bellow "Gizzard?" and the bird immediately hung a right and came home. I believe him -- you would be a fool not to. Imagine if he yelled at you from a few feet away -- no more music.

It seems Gizzard was out on the porch for a whiff of fresh air and taking in some sun, when he got loose somehow and decided to see for himself the wonders of the lee side. Gizzard flew up into the tree back of the house, and, of course, caused quite a stir. Ralph tried to coax him down but to no avail, they just had their normal conversation, "Gizzard" by Ralph and "Oh, Ralph" by Gizzard.

Gizzard is a fair size and has a beak to match and I would imagine he could take a finger off if he got a hold of one he didn't especially care for.

I've heard a Parrot is like an Elephant -- they live to a ripe old age and have a memory to match -- nothing else, thank God. Gizzard is probably in the fifteen to twenty year range. Seems Doll thinks its a she and Ralph a he. Who knows? For you and me -- a he will do.

Gizzard got to trying his wings and probably hasn't had so much fun since he moved up to the Point from King. Finally, old Gizzard went for a little loop de loop and ended up in the Maple tree that grew just off our balcony. There he spent the night and the next day giving an occasional squawk or two just to let you know he was still there. This was a holiday weekend and we decided to cook a roast on the B.B.Q. Gizzard may have been attracted to the aroma of a garlic-laced leg of lamb wafting up through the branches. Who knows? But he stayed there.

Gizzard has a fairly loud voice also -- comes by it naturally, I guess -- and when he started squawking he really made a racket, then with Ralph answering, it was ear plug time.

Understandably, Ralph was getting just a little concerned about Gizzard and he had to try anything possible, so he went up on our balcony to get closer to him. You know, to get kissey face, if possible. Carole was up on the balcony with Ralph to lend a hand, giving Ralph a little snugly, and pecks on the cheek hoping to make Gizzard jealous so he would surrender -- you figure it?

I was sure he had his eye on the B.B.Q. and its contents below and with his beak he could

probably have opened it like a can opener. There's Ralph on the balcony playing Romeo -- "Gizzard" then small talk -- this goes on for a while -- then Gizzard squawks and gives an "Oh Ralph, Oh Ralph." You should have been there, it was uh, different. Gizzard didn't move. Another night passed in the tree and Monday found Gizzard had moved over a bit to a tall oak that the neighbours were about to cut down with their chain saws. Ralph made them aware of the situation and they held off.



Finally, Gizzard flew back to the tree in Ralph & Doll's backyard. Ralph climbed up and coaxed him onto his two fingers, after promising not to yell at him -- because Gizzard virtually had Ralph *up a tree*. Ralph brought him down to the comfort and safety of his cage.

"Oh Ralph -- Gizzard."

THE PURPLE MARTIN HOTEL

Grandpa, that's what the ad read in the Globe and Mail. So, I followed up ordering our Martin house from a company down in London. Two weeks passed, then there it was on the front porch, the grandfather model, all aluminium, with twelve compartments, removable doors and floors that you can remove to clean properly, complete with a metal pole. This product originated in Grigsville, Illinois, where there are a couple of hundred giant houses erected for the Martins. They even publish a newspaper, The Purple Martin News.

When we were putting the house up for the first time, back in 1988, we didn't know what to expect -- never having seen a Martin before. Then, along came one about two days later and we have had them ever since. Some years have been better than others, but any year with Martins is a good year.

The Martins come back the same time every year -- that's within a day or two; three years in a row they showed up on exactly the same day, April 13. Last year and the year before when I took the house out of storage, put the pole in its receptacle and was in the process of raising the house by pulling the rope, a Martin suddenly appeared out of nowhere. The moment the house was secured, the Martin was on it, just like that.

This year the Martins were one day late, not bad when you consider the odds of making it at all. The Martins send scouts ahead of the main flocks to locate their prospective nesting sites. It's impossible to tell whether or not the very same Birds return every year, but I would think a majority do.

When it comes to building nests, the Martins won't win any awards for craftsmanship or neatness, they just haul in the lumber, leaves, twigs, root material, etc. They just kind of jam it in there. Carole and I always like to lower the house at least once to see how things are going, you know -- count the eggs, see what's hatched and remove any dead babies. The year before last the mortality rate was quite high, there were thirteen unhatched eggs and five dead babies -- this was just after a late frost killed off their food supply. I don't know how that relates to the eggs, but I suspect it's nature's way of solving the impending food shortage. The parents simply abandon the nest.

A couple of years ago I dropped the house and Carole and I looked in. We were at eye level with the babies and they were looking straight at us. I wonder what they must think? Hokey cow, the mother comes back and the babies say, "Mom, you wouldn't believe it. There's these two great big monsters, big heads, great big eyes, looking at us." The mother is probably going to say "Hey, look you kids, I have told you to stop looking at the sun. It will hurt your eyes -- besides, there's no

monsters -- how are you going to get monsters up here. Too many Shadflies, that's what it is, I'll have to change your diet."

The Martins are flying at 4:30 in the morning. They are out catching insects, whatever is in hatch at the time. They don't stop until the last fading minutes of night fall. These Birds just chatter away like crazy, they never shut up, as our good neighbours, Frank and Ellen, know. But, in the spring that is one of the most beautiful sounds you ever want to hear. The male Martin sits up there and lets go with one of those trills, followed by a chatter and another trill, just beautiful.

I said to Frank one day during a hot spell, "those Birds must drive you crazy -- how do you ever sleep with the windows open?" Frank said, "you know, you don't really notice it that much, but the time when you do notice it is when they are gone." I never thought of that as our windows are usually closed that time of year. They notice the quiet.

The Martins are friendly Birds and I say this in the sense that they don't bother other Birds. They spend all their days flying and catching whatever they can to feed their young, that's what it's all about. They don't have time for anything else. Now mind you, a Cat, Squirrel, even myself will get dive-bombed if they feel the nest is threatened. They will also go after larger Birds if they come too close. Of course, if you happen to bump the pole with the lawn mower, out they all come (if they are at home at the time), just a

squawking and really giving you what for. There's something else about these purple beauties. After the Martins fly in with food for the young, and just as they are ready to leave, the parents will pick up the babies droppings and fly away with it, usually leaving it a hundred or so feet away -- often over the water.

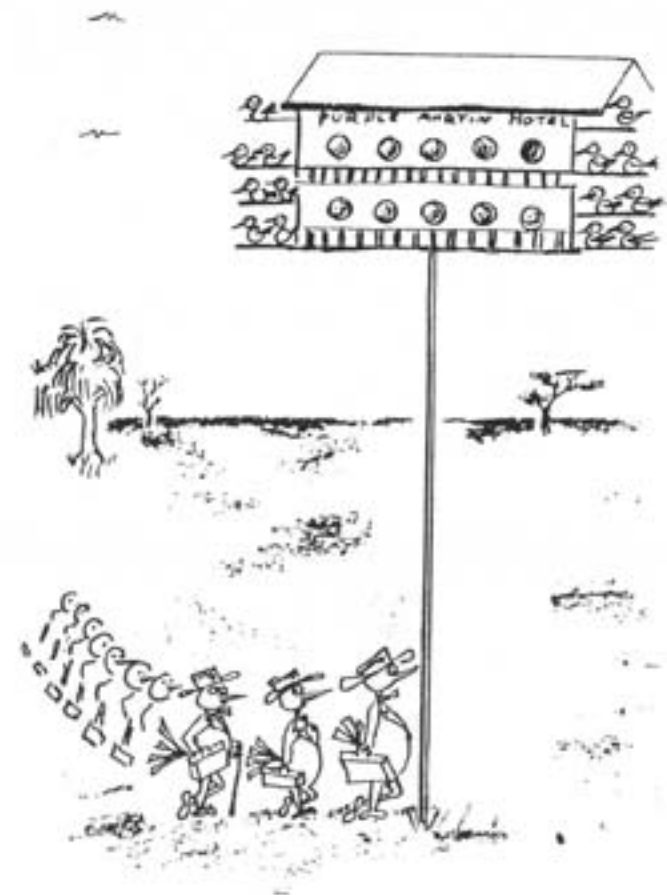
You don't find any droppings below the house; in fact, what you will find on the grass below is a lot of twigs, grass, leaves, and mud that has fallen during the nest building.

The Martins like a house sitting in the open, away from trees, where there is a clear flight path and 12 to 15 feet above the ground. They also prefer the house oriented in a certain direction, primarily holes at a right angle to the prevailing wind. That means East-West and stay away from the North-South. You want the wind to go by the entrance holes, not in them. On those real hot days, in the middle of summer, 90°, a metal house, three or four babies, it is amazing. The heat apparently doesn't bother them.

Over the years, I have observed a particular characteristic of the Martins. The adults, when nest building, scrutinize all the cubicles and ultimately always take a corner unit. Just like most people with apartments or condominiums, the corners go first. The inside units are the last to go. On occasion, I have found the start of a nest in an inside unit, but this, I suspect, is the effort of an adolescent following its instincts. (I have no scientific documentation of this, it's just my own

casual observation.)

You will hear a lot of thrashing and crashing going on in these empty units -- mating season in full tilt. Occasionally, you will observe this particular activity down on the grass, but if you give it some thought, considering the total number of Birds out there and some species raise more than one family a season, this reproduction process is rather inconspicuous.



There are rarely abandoned eggs or babies in the inside units. The baby Martins use these when one of them gets forced out of its own unit. This happens when the parents are feeding them and one will get over anxious and fall or be pushed out onto the ledge. The others usually don't let their sibling back in right away, so it will often take refuge in a vacant unit. By night fall, the unfortunate baby would be back home safe and sound.

Mom or Dad will bring home the fattest Dragonfly for lunch it can find. I have watched the parent stuff one down a baby's throat as far as it can. The insect was actually folded in half with the tail, wings and head protruding from its mouth, then another baby beside it grabbed a section and tried to swallow its share. An actual tug of war ensues, the winner so far as I have been able to ascertain, always the original recipient of this delectable food source.

When the last baby has fledged and has been flying for just a few days, the annual ritual of the return flight to their winter home in the Amazon basin begins to materialize. You will see them flocking in the evenings, high up in the sky, fattening up on late hatching insects, the young from each unit flying in unison with their parents, dipping and diving, twisting and turning, in a variety of aerial manoeuvres. It is not uncommon to see twenty to thirty Birds in one general group work their way up and down the shoreline passing

another group going the opposite direction, and at the same time intermingled with the Swallows. It's something to watch a group of ten to fifteen Birds suddenly break from their flight pattern and dive to within inches of the water and skip across it after a new emerging hatch of insects -- only to once again rise on an updraft and join another group of Martins until the fading light signals them all to return to their nests. Here they will sit for a good fifteen minutes softly chattering -- their voices taking on a subdued nature before entering the units, leaving only the males to stand guard as the black of night descends upon them. Within one week, two at most, they are gone. This usually takes place around August 8th.

The Purple Martin Hotel has served its purpose. The yearly ritual of taking the house down and cleaning it as soon as they and their young have left continues. In the spring, it will be put back up for them. The leaves will soon begin to turn colour and fall, then winter, will be upon us. I will dream of spring and with it the anticipation of another Martin circling the house as it is raised and to once again enjoy their company and listen to their chattering and their trills.