

No Exits

By P. Donohue Shortridge

Canadian Geese are extraordinary creatures. They mate for life. They travel in large family groups including their yearlings who remain with the flock for an entire year. If a goose in the group falls ill or is shot down, two geese stay behind with their injured kin to stand guard till it either dies or can fly again. The most mature male goose is often the leader and can communicate with over ten distinct vocalizations.

Canadian Geese are extremely protective of their life mate. While the female goose is nesting, her partner remains close by, chasing away any intruders. However, young adult geese may abandon the nest or fail to ward off predators. It takes maturity and patience to be an adult . . . as I am learning in my own life.

Every morning this past Spring, I've had the privilege to observe a pair of nesting Canadian Geese. The female built her nest in a clay pot near our swimming pool. She did not move from that spot for over three weeks. Whenever I passed by, her partner would always be right there, either swimming or sunning himself on the grassy bank. Sometimes a bachelor duck would swim with the male and once I watched the goose couple take a short swim together near the nest, then saw the female return to the nest, preen herself and settle in for another long sit. She situated herself so that her softest down rested gently on her eggs keeping them warm and protected. Once she was settled, the male resumed his patrol.

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Oh yes, it was an extraordinary Spring here in our home by the water. Watching nature unfold all around us in our riparian paradise, I am delighting in the direct experience of the natural world, really for the first time in my life. Nature's order and rhythm comforts me profoundly. And I am learning that such comfort

translates into acceptance of not only the natural world's rhythms but of the human world's as well.

While I have been impressed by the fact of, as well as the sight of the male goose remaining reliably by his partner's side, I have recently become conscious of my own partner's devotion. But such epiphanies are usually served up to me in the form of a lesson. This one was no exception.

Recently, when my husband made a genuine gesture of his good faith, I was struck dumb. I whirled and sobbed because I was truly surprised that he would offer such

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a gift so easily. As he silently observed my dramatics, his perplexed and mildly shocked countenance telegraphed to me that I had not yet accepted the natural harmony of our life together. I was out of whack. Of course it was natural for him to be faithful and generous because he is my husband. This is what a life partner does. And it is my office to accept, just as he accepts my good will. I finally saw what he'd been showing me for years; that it is safe to release my old guarded way.

So sitting there together at sunset that night, listening to the birds' nightsongs, I decided to accept. To accept not only his good faith, but also the natural-ness that I do so. I can now assume he'll always be here with me just as I assume the male goose will be camped on the grassy bank when I walk by each morning. I don't have to ask. I don't have to wonder. It just is.

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fostering the authentic life of children and their families in the American culture