

Grey Goose Day

By Bonnie Dickmann

It's the saddest damn thing you'll ever see—a lone goose. Geese aren't supposed to be alone.

In spring, you'll see them in pairs, looking for a place to nest and have their babies. By summer, those babies are ready to follow their parents around in the water and on long flights to anywhere. By fall, everyone has bunched up into large flocks to head south, south of Wisconsin anyway, to where warm waters stay open all year round.

So when you see a lone goose it's not a good thing. It could be because he's lost his partner due to death, or he's been injured and can't keep up with his flock. Whatever the reason, a lone goose will make any nature-lover mourn.

I live on the shores of Lake Michigan and tracking the daily activities of seagulls, ducks and geese is one of the perks I get for weathering lousy winters and high taxes here in Wisconsin. On one particular grey, rainy November day, I was stuck inside, riding out the fourth day of a case of flu. Not used to being forced down by any ailment, I was restless and irritable. I paced from sofa to chair, trying to find a comfortable spot to cuddle into. For some reason, I glanced outside to the beach.



Photo by Judy Halverson



Photo by Gervase Thompson

The grey of the sky met the grey of the lake, making it almost impossible to discern a horizon. The beach was empty. No humans, no deer, no birds—or so I thought. As my fevered eyes roamed the sandy beach, I noticed movement to the south. I grabbed the pair of binoculars we keep handy for just this reason and set my sights on the dark patch.

There on the beach stood a lone goose. He just stood there, not moving. The melancholy of the grey day coupled with this solitary bird held me captive.

Being sick and home alone is miserable enough, but this lone goose was enough to make me want to write a country/western song or something.

The phone ringing was a welcome chance to reconnect with the real world. It was my daughter, calling to see if I was feeling any better. While we talked, I moved back to the sofa and looked down the beach. More than ninety minutes had passed and my lone goose still stood there, by himself, but now nearer to my house. He was clearly visible with the naked eye, looking out into the lake. Not moving much except to preen his feathers once in a while.

After my daughter and I finished our conversation, I could not bear to leave my lonely visitor. Should I go out there? Should I try to feed him? What do geese eat anyway? All these ridiculous ideas of trying to help this solitary goose, when my nature background knew I could nothing to assuage his pain, whatever that might be.

As I continued this vigil with my avian friend, a raucous group of seagulls came to the area where the he stood and quickly convinced him he needed to move further down the beach again. The gulls reminded me of every bunch of mean teenage girls whose taunts and jeers made school days miserable for me. These gulls bullied the goose into moving farther down the beach again. I felt my throat constrict and turned my head away again, not able to stand how sad I felt.

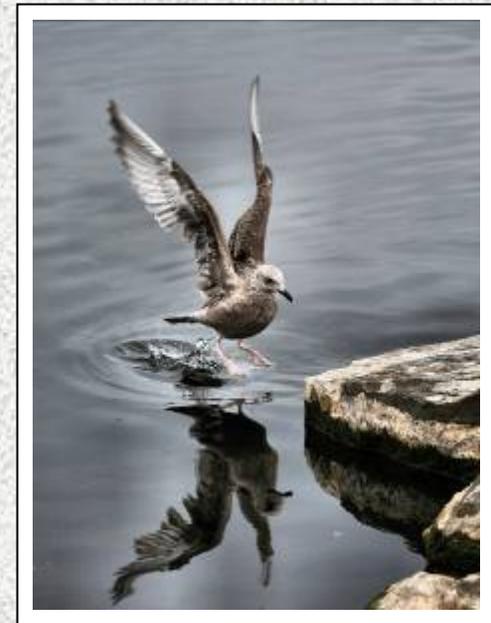


Photo by Dianne Krewald

Scanning the waters to the north, I spotted a flock of geese, maybe thirty, floating peacefully out on the lake, about one hundred yards off shore. I quickly looked back at my lone goose, willing him to step into the water and swim to meet his brethren, but he stood there, not moving.

The flock kept swimming south until they were even with my beached friend. As if they read my thoughts, the flock turned from their southerly course and headed west toward shore. That navigational change was just what the lone goose seemed to be waiting for. He waded into the water and swam out to meet the flock. After he caught up to them, they all turned and continued swimming north until I lost sight of them. I returned to my chair with a smile. I didn't feel as feverish or restless anymore.

Some days, it's the smallest of miracles that makes all the difference.



Photo by Jim Raiten