

Animal Stories

by Kern Hagg

(#12 of Series)

With a little help from my life-long friend, Scott Hutchins, we recalled three different animal stories when we grew up in Stonegate during the 50's and 60's. Scott's family lived at 403 S. Carlisle, so he had a perspective on the south side of Stonegate compared to mine which was usually north side. Scott's parents bought the property in about 1955. In the home behind theirs which faced Windsor Parkway, they had a hedgerow of Poplar trees. Apparently, Grackles (black birds) enjoyed nesting in those trees, so they were plentiful in the neighborhood. When Scott's dad, Don, went to mow his backyard, he would frequently be dive bombed by these aggressive birds when they had chicks in their nests. The birds would literally flutter across the top of his head, and, of course, he was afraid of having his eyes plucked out. His solution was to strap a big beam lantern to the front of his rotary lawnmower and mow his lawn at night. He did this for the entire summer and avoided a calamity with the birds. Back at the north end on Derbyshire, we had three huge Elm trees in our backyard at that time, and Grackles were frequently in those trees too. We solved the problem with a Daisy BB gun. I don't believe we killed the birds, but we certainly made it unpleasant for them to roost there, so they moved on.

Our second animal story involved Snapping turtles. Across from what is now Prospect High School, on the north side of Kensington, was small a wet-land area which we called Sponge Lake. It was harboring Snapping turtles which we would transport back and forth to Stonegate in the baskets on our bikes. One of these small turtles ripped a tiny piece of flesh from the back of my thumb, so I learned to respect the length of their necks, because just holding the turtle by the shell was no guarantee that he could not reach your fingers. My friend, Scott, had captured a larger turtle six to eight inches in diameter, and he built an environment for it in his garage for a short while. Ultimately, that turtle was returned to Sponge Lake also. Many years later, there was a report of a huge Snapping turtle on the shores of Sponge Lake, and the City of Mount Prospect Animal Control people had to remove it.

The last story involves chipmunks. As you know, they devour roots of many of the plantings around our homes, and there was a scourge of chipmunks during the late 50's which affected the rose bushes, vegetable gardens and numerous other plantings which died soon after the roots were eaten by chipmunks. Some friends showed us how to catch them with glass one-gallon milk jugs. Every chipmunk tunnel had an exist and an entrance, and they were usually about 15 to 20 feet apart. We would insert the neck of an empty milk bottle into one hole and pour a gallon of water into the other. Soon thereafter, one of the critters would shoot up into the empty bottle, and we had captured another 13-striped chipmunk. We took the little guys on our bikes to open fields east of Stonegate and let them go free to wonder somewhere besides our parents' flower gardens.

We never saw larger animals such as deer, racoons, skunks and the like. I think the railroad tracks plus Northwest Highway on the south prevented these four-legged creatures from wondering into Stonegate. Although we had farm fields to the north in 1953, it was soon thereafter that residential homes plus Miner and Windsor schools began popping up where corn and soybeans had grown before. At that point, the only animals running around Stonegate were domesticated dogs and cats.