

Earth Day Celebration

by DeMisty Bellinger

At the annual Earth Day celebration, Frieda looked up in the sky and saw a lone goose. It had caught her attention with its call, echoing off the buildings and trees. She remembered hearing about geese and their travels, about how they were monogamous and traveled with their mate. When one of a couple of geese was killed, the other would stray from the gander to seek out his or her life partner. Maybe, Frieda thought, this one never had a partner. Maybe she always flew alone and without a gander.

Frieda looked at the crowd when the goose flew out of her field of vision. It didn't appear as if anyone else noticed the bird. A band played conga drums and maracas, sang in a language she did not know, and strummed Western string instruments. Children played in the mud or with Earth-friendly toys. Adults wandered from booth to booth to learn about mass transportation, or electric and hybrid cars, or composting their waste, or recycling. Frieda was sure no one noticed the bird.

Frieda gathered her blanket, camera, and water bottle and stuffed them into her backpack. She slid her sandals on and looked around at the crowd. None of them noticed the goose. She walked out of the park and on down the street in the direction of the goose's flight. She had an idea of where the bird would go.

Pass the high school by the river, the fast food and the traditional family restaurants, Frieda came into the ghetto. No ghetto was safe. This one was on edge because the Milwaukee non-ghetto-ites have noticed that the houses over here were old, grand and beautiful. This ghetto was going through gentrification, a process which involved raising property values and creating mob-like neighborhood watches. These were tactics to rid the ghetto of its undesirable current residents and replace them with more affluent residents. These inner-city citizens knew it. The renters saw their rents raised, the homeowner saw their taxes increased. These people were too

busy looking down to look up at some sometimes violent bird. Frieda walked on.

Some geese, Frieda read, don't migrate much anymore. On the east coast, residents were up in arms— sometimes literally— about the geese that meandered around golf courses and newly-developed suburban homes. They shat all over the place. They're big. They're unwanted. Sometimes, they attack people and even their children. The victims often reported that the attacks came with no provocation. Of course, encroachment on one's home, be it the ghetto or newly-developed developments in lightly wooded areas, could not be considered as a catalyst. The ghetto dwellers and the geese should get together and overthrow these "gentrifying" people, thought Frieda.

Frieda walked through the changing neighborhood and continued into Glendale, a popular and expensive suburb near Lake Michigan. It always amazed Frieda how close these two communities were, only, literally, a set of train tracks divided them. This part of Glendale was industrial. Saturday afternoon, sunny day, and most of the workers were inside grinding at some machine or developing varicose veins and/or carpal tunnel in some assembly line. Maybe one of them had a couple of geese visiting them in her yard on her day off. Maybe not. Frieda held her breath against the smell of sulphur and walked on.

Frieda considered aerodynamics. Throughout history, flying birds' bodies developed to get the optimal form for flight. Migratory birds, such as the Canadian geese, also flew in V formation for that same reason. Some flew all the way to Mexico in winter, many miles an hour and many miles above the earth. Frieda, not feeling her feet anymore, felt as if she were flying, too.

Frieda came to Glendale's residential area. It was much quieter than her neighborhood on the other side of the tracks. So quiet that she had the feeling that she could hear things before they happened. She preferred the loud car systems, the yelling people, the imposing house stereos, honking horns and screaming kids of her neighborhood to the illusion of an absence of life in the suburban

village. These people had children, she thought. Where were these children? It was a beautiful day, but there was not a child chasing a ball outside. Not a jump rope. Not feet in circles to be eeny-meeny-miny-moed, no mothers on porches. Some fathers or older sons mowing lawns, though. Lawns where the grass haven't started growing yet were being cut lower. These suburban children had play groups. They had trumpet lessons, soccer practice or tutoring. They may play supervised in parks. They were too good to adorn the lawn beside lawn jockeys with antiqued cast iron black hands and faces painted white, and well-contained wild flower gardens. They were too self-absorbed in the American dream to notice a single goose overhead. These neighborhoods gave Frieda the creeps. She walked on.

Finally, Frieda reached her destination. It was in another suburb not far from her neighborhood. Whitefish Bay, where some properties abutted the lake, was only walking distance to another ghetto not much different from her own. Whitefish Bay held Estabrook Park. Estabrook had a brook and a little fishing pond. Long ago, a good friend showed her where deer slept in that park. Deer so near to the city! Two years ago, she saw many geese here drinking from the pond and eating whatever swam beneath. She walked through the park to this pond. She was sure that single female goose was around there.

She spotted five geese in the pond. An odd number. One lone gal goose. Frieda fancied that it was her goose. "Their babies are there," a bass voice said behind her. A worked over black hand pointed in her field of vision. An un-jeweled hand. A tired but strong hand. Nails uneven and black in the rims.

Frieda followed the pointing finger and, sure enough, there were three goslings. "Wonderful," she said.

"Geese mate for life," the voice told her. She turned to face him. He was a tall man with long dread locks. A decent looking man.

Frieda took her backpack off and reached in for her camera and a roll of film. She opened the back of the camera and held it up towards the sun. "Goodbye, Earth Day Celebration," she said. She

threw the film in a receptacle for picnicking visitors. She reloaded her camera and turned to the man. He was around her age.

"And when one goose is killed or dies when his or her mate isn't around, the survivor will seek him. Or her." She pointed at the single female. "That's my survivor," she said. She took pictures of the large bird alone, then took pictures of the others.

