CANADA GOOSE

Introduction:

During the early weeks of winter Canadians are very acquainted with that traditional quacking sound coming from above followed by a flock of birds in a somewhat V-formation flying south. This is the migration of the CANADA GEESE to warmer ground in the south. They usually return in early spring.

I have witnessed scenes like this hundreds of times during my years in Canada but I never paid too much attention to it; Until .....

This is where my story begins:

During the early spring months, I discovered some Canada Geese wandering around the driveway of the factory. It seemed a bit odd to me.

My presence did not seem to disturb them; they were apparently looking for some food. I thought it would be a good idea to give them a piece of my sandwich which I had prepared from home.

Oh what a treat it was for them! They really enjoyed that croissant.

They disappeared for a while only to return with the rest of the family, about 20 of them.

Being an animal lover, I began observing them. Obviously, I began purchasing extra croissants for them too.

I heard that in certain municipalities they prefer that you do not feed them. I am quite aware of the controversy.

I thought that it was a temporary thing. Maybe they were lost or maybe it was a one time visit.

However, I was sitting in my office one day working on my computer when I heard a funny noise at my window – like someone knocking.

When I looked outside, I saw a couple of Canada Geese.

They had the nerve, guts and the audacity to knock at my window and look at me right in the eye.

I tried to tell them to go away by signaling them out, but they continued knocking at the window.

I went outside and tried to tell them to go away. Maybe being Canada
Geese, they understand perfect English; they did not understand my Greek-Canadian accent because they continued looking at me.

Obviously, they did not come to say hello, or to see what I was doing. Neither were they interested in how the business was progressing. They communicated that they were hungry.

I checked the office refrigerator and found a few slices of bread and proceeded outside. I walked into the parking lot.

To my surprise there was a whole flock of geese. It appeared that the geese had brought the whole family and close relatives to meet me.

I sat down on the sidewalk with the food in my hand and watched them move with their special strides of whole body movement.

It took more than half-an-hour, until finally they came close to me and started eating from my hand. Oh what an experience this was!

I even got to know them by name. One had a deficiency in the leg and was limping.

He told me his name was Limping John.

Another one had a few feathers missing from the tail. His name was Jimmy Missing Feather. And the third one told me he had barely escaped death while down south flying through some States where they allow hunting.

Needless to say, he had quite a few feathers missing from his wings and his nickname was Wingless Joe.

How funny it is when they are flying above people think they all look alike. But when they get close to you, you notice the subtle differences among them.

I left them there, but I told them I would be back sometime since I was quite busy that day.

They seemed to observe the type and colour of my car as I was driving away by making some quack, quack noises among themselves. Apparently, telling each other to be on the look out for my next appearance.

The next day, half-way down the street, I noticed that they were on the edge of the rooftops of the factories.

I remembered I did not have any food for them so I turned around and proceeded to my favourite bakery. With the geese very much on my mind, when the cashier enquired as to what I needed, I responded “wha, wha,” She in turn responded, I beg your pardon.

I then indicated that I needed a couple of sliced loaves of bread.

Upon my return, I cut these slices into small pieces and threw them at the side of the road. To my surprise there were two families instead of
one, around 40 of them.

This is when I realized that each family consisted of about 20 geese.

The next day, they were again perched on the roof – awaiting my arrival. Since I was not prepared for this and had not purchased any bread, I spread rice on the grass area, and to my surprise, they all seemed to enjoy it very much.

At the end of their dinner they let me know that they had heard about the quality of Mr. Goudas Rice down south and they really, really, really enjoyed every grain.

(Seriously, there was not a rice grain left anywhere).

They began to honk ‘wha wha wha’. In human language, they were telling me ‘We had a nice rice day today’.

The next day, I gave them a different variety of rice and they enjoyed that very much too.

As summer approached, the staff and I enjoyed eating outdoors and the geese became quite familiar with our presence and we enjoyed theirs.

By that time there were 6 to 7 families of Canada Geese resident at our location. It was an amazing sight.

As everyone is aware, they ‘go potty’ everywhere. Therefore, we made sure that someone always washed the area.

The traffic during the daytime is very busy; and obviously for some reason or another they do not care. They do know that humans can only walk or run, or the worst case scenario, they drive.

However, the geese know that they can fly, which is a very big plus, and if you bother them too much they can make a quick turn above your head, and, with great accuracy, they can make a special deposit right on your head.

Nevertheless, I started learning more about their behaviour through the Internet; yet there is no information on the websites as to how intelligent these birds are.

As I continued to observe them, I needed more and more food. It so happened that a friend of mine, Pasquale D’Aversa passed away. I wrote a very nice article about his life and when I visited the Bakery his children asked me what they could do for me for such a nice gesture. I mentioned the need for 1 or 2 day-old bread loafs, buns, etc. I was therefore privileged to be able at any time I had a need, to simply go there and fill up a few bags of day-old bread.

And as I said earlier on, these geese have become fa-
miliar with my vehicle and actually perch themselves on the roof-tops of the buildings en route to my factory awaiting my arrival.

I spent more than one hour per day communicating with them. I even learned to make some of their “wha wha” sounds. I also observed that they communicated only with me.

A few things surprise me about the intelligence of these birds. Just at sundown, they prepare for departure.... One of the geese proceeds to the centre of the square, while the other geese all flap their wings to ensure that there is adequate wing-span, i.e. distance between each other.

They all face in one direction.

At one point, the lead goose, apparently the leader, gives a signal, and all of the geese instantly, within a fraction of a second, make a 180-degree turn, all facing in the opposite direction, and stand very still, almost breathless, and do not make a single sound, whatsoever.

The leader of the particular group that is about to depart, seems to start calling each by name, for instance: Limping John. Then Limping John responds, ‘wha’, similar to an army roll-call, when the sergeant shouts a particular name and the private responds, ‘wha’ - present, sir.

After ensuring that everyone is accounted for, the leader gives the signal for departure and the group of 20 takes off instantly.

A few seconds later, the very same manoeuvres are performed by the next leader and that group takes flight.

It is a fascinating sight to observe each and every group take off with such precision.

Some unfortunate birds may be missing from the group because they may have ended up on the dinner table as a BBQ to some avid hunter.

It is important to note that dogs and cats scare them away. Regardless of how preoccupied they are eating, there are always 1 or 2 geese on guard duty.

My beloved pet, Koukla, spent many hours alone indoors during the day-time because her presence scared them away. She did let me know of her displeasure by constantly barking.

I had a wonderful summer with my Canada Geese, one of the best I have ever had.

I was never alone or lonely!
Yet, similar to stories in Greek Mythology with the dual masks, representing comedy and tragedy; all good things come to an end.

In this situation, one Sunday afternoon, the third week in November, I ended up with at least 25 families, approximately 500 birds, in the courtyard. They must have had a general meeting and a global positioning system (GPS) for them all to be able to find my location.

To some, this could have been a scary moment, but to me it was a beautiful sight to behold.

I walked freely amongst them with food in my hand. They had a wonderful time. And so did I.

Finally, at the end of the day, they all gathered in the courtyard and made their preparations for departure much more thoroughly than any other night.

Suddenly, they changed their pattern of 20 at the time group take-off, and after their usual roll-call, they ALL took flight simultaneously.

As I observed them flying away in the sky, I noticed that all made a 360-degree turn and flew back towards me.

I outstretched my fingers and hands towards the sky. It seemed like they were only a few feet above my head.

It was as if they were thanking me for the wonderful summer they spent in my company.

At that moment, tears filled my eyes.

Who knows if I will have the pleasure of being reunited with them next year!

Spyros Peter Goudas

The above story has been published in several newspapers, and in different languages.