Goose – VS – Eagle

By: Burt Jude Lancon

My wife is a Canadian citizen, and I am a citizen of the United States. It was on my last trip to Winnipeg that I was able to understand many things. While in Canada I found myself trying to feel what it would be like to be Canadian full time. As an American, we are proud, loud and boisterous at times. Canadians are quiet and reserved.

We have the bald eagle: golden beak, piercing black eyes, pure white crown and iridescent blue-black body that are supported by lethal talons.

Canadians have the goose: pale yellow bill, round worried eyes, cream colored head and long comical neck that connects to a dull, muddy brown plumage revealing webbed feet.

The eagle screams its call out for patriotism at a pitch heard from miles across the prairie. It is a sound held in the hearts of all red-blooded Americans.

The Canadian goose has a honk. Not unlike the sound of a horny wounded donkey. The double squawk made by sucking in air for one pitch and expelling its breath to cap off the non-regalness of the song.

But it was on a car ride with my young daughter one afternoon that my impression of the two changed by one lone goose, which I had thought was just a joke of a national symbol.

Not long ago the fields near our home were vast and open to the migrating and nesting geese. Now the areas populated by new housing and Manitoba's first IKEA.

On that ride home from the mall, I remembered that the Canadian goose mates forever. Something I find so beautiful and pure. In a way, I can relate. When I fell in love with my wife, it was as uncontrollable as the instinct of the Canadian goose. I looked over at my daughter, leaned over to her and said, " You know the Canadian geese marry each other for life and never get divorced?" She paused, leaned over toward me, grinned and said, "Just like you and mommy?"

Before I could reply, I saw a row of cars stopped ahead of us. One by one, when the opposing traffic would allow, the vehicles were pulling slowly into the opposite lane and driving away. When we were next in line to pass what I thought was a stalled car or a chunk of fallen ice from a speeding semi truck, my daughter and I saw that it was two Canadian geese in the road. One was lying down and was not alive. The other was standing guard, not allowing cars to come near its mate. Pacing back and forth the lone survivor was having a showdown with each vehicle attempting to pass. As the vehicles moved to the left, the goose would race to the left, daring it to move any closer.

I ask you this. Would the American eagle do this? Would the American eagle mate for life? Would he stay by her side to protect her? Would he never leave her side, even in death?

I looked in the rearview mirror to see if there were any cars behind me. I could see that we were the last.

Being the American, the protector of all lands, I felt I had to do something, so I parked my car and got out. My daughter kneeled in her seat watching with her hands on the dashboard and wide eyes inches from the windshield. There I stood standing in the face of this stoic majestic and loyal to the death animal, and I suddenly felt what it must feel like to be a Canadian.

Slowly I made one small step and then another. Carefully, I moved toward the dead bird in the road. With each step I took, the guarding mate kept its distance equal from me. Eye to eye we watched each other.

I paused, took a breath, bent my knees, leaned forward and with one continuous motion, keeping my attention on both geese, I slid my hands under the departed loved one. Standing slowly with the lifeless goose in my arms, turned toward the side of the road. When I did, I

noticed my feathered friend was right beneath my hands, which held the dead goose. We looked at each other as I placed the lifeless bird on the side of the road in the weathered reeds and grass.

Not wanting to intrude upon one of nature's true wonders of life and death, I quickly made my way back to my daughter waiting in the car. We sat quietly for a second taking in what just took place. The silence in the car; broken with the sweetest words a father could hear, "you did good daddy!"

I placed the car in drive, looked back in the rearview mirror and saw the lone goose sitting next to its lifelong mate.

*****