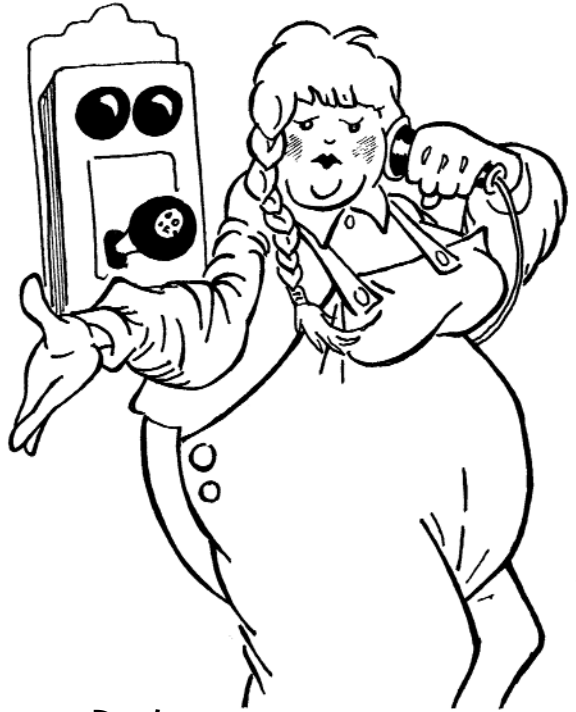


Miller 2005



Ma's Ducks

Also about this time (early sixties), Dad decided to dig a pond to drain the swamp. He hired a dragline (a big bucket on a crane) and started digging over one of the larger springs that bubbled water to the surface year round. When finished we had a small lake about a quarter of an acre in size and more than ten feet deep in the middle, and we soon filled it with 1,000 rainbow trout. There is a little stream that runs off the over flow and finds its way to the Snoqualmie River. We mowed lawn all the way around the pond and we built a cookout with a cedar shake roof with a four-foot wide barbecue. On holidays when all the kids were home we would have a picnic and the kids would swim and run races around the pond.

One year Mom said, "I want two pair of mallard ducks

for the pond. Dale, you and Joe find me some.” It was soon decided that the best place to get a few ducks would be Lake Sammamish. The people living on the lake and the visitors at the park fed them so much that they could barely fly, so we figured that with salmon dip nets and the speedboat we could pick a few right out of the air.

We put the boat in at the public ramp and Joe idled the boat out to a flock of a few hundred. With Wayne on the port side and myself on the starboard, our nets ready, Joe hit the throttle and we were off. We each netted a duck about the same time but found that at thirty-five miles per hour a duck will go through the webbing and not even slow down. Damn, we needed two new salmon nets and a better plan.

I remembered that the parking lot for the Penny’s store in Kirkland was right on Lake Washington and there were always ducks there, so I drove down there with a bag of popcorn. I parked in the shade, tied a piece of twine to the passenger door, shoved the door open and sat behind the steering wheel. I threw the popped corn out on the ground and soon had several ducks feeding. I spilled some on the floor and two pair of mallards hopped in the pickup. I pulled the door shut and left for home. By the time I got home the inside of the truck had popped corn, feathers and duck shit everywhere, but I had Ma’s ducks. I pulled in by the pond and opened the door and the ducks jumped right in. They were swimming around when Mom got there. Soon she was sitting in a lawn chair feeding them bread. And, for a while at least, all was good with the world.

Come spring Mom said, “I hope they nest and we can have little ones.” Well that happened all right, over and over again, and soon we had more damn ducks than you could count. If Ma did try to feed them it wouldn’t be from a lawn

chair. She would be running and dodging and throwing bread over her shoulder with a hundred ducks chasing her. It was about this time that she said, “Dale get rid of them damn ducks and don’t be thinking of shooting them! I want you boys to catch them all. I’ll go get on the phone and find them a new home.”

Well, I didn’t think that I could fit a hundred ducks in the front of my pickup, but brother Joe’s truck had a canopy on the back. And if we could catch them, it would hold them okay—but we still had to catch them.

We had an old gillnet in the barn and it would reach across the pond. The plan was to wait until night with brothers on both sides of the pond to walk it along and catch ducks. It didn’t work all that well, and we still had to catch about eighty more.

They really liked bread and we would get a few of them by throwing the net over them but they soon caught on to this plan were too fast for us. We had to slow them down a little so a new plan was hatched: let’s get the bugger’s drunk!

We mixed a fifth of gin and a fifth of whiskey in a pan and got two loaves of bread, soaked them in the booze and started feeding the ducks on the lawn. It wasn’t long and we had them all. Joe had to rescue one, old Drake, that had staggered into the pond and was swimming around with his head under the water.

We reported to Ma that we had all of them in the back of the pickup and she said, “Good. The farmerette up on Stillwater Hill wants them all, and she is waiting for you to bring them.” (Some people said the farmerette was a retired prostitute—others said, “She ain’t retired.”) When we got there, we backed up to the pond and started setting the

ducks out on the ground. I looked over at the woman and she looked a little startled and asked, “Are they all right? They’re acting a little peculiar.”

I replied, “They will be okay in no time, they’re just a little car sick from the ride up. You know like motion sickness.” She nodded yes, and we said we had to get going and took off. In a day or so she called Mom and said all of the ducks were doing fine. The motion sickness lasted for the remainder of the first day and the quacking wasn’t ducklike at all. She said that some of them just laid on their backs and watched their feet moving, others would walk around with their necks stretched out and heads sliding on the ground and staggering just like they were drunk.