

## Encountering Cranes at Picnic Point

by Margery Katz

In a recent issue of the FCNA newsletter, a small notice was included calling for individuals to share a story about an experience at a campus natural area. My encounter with cranes at Picnic Point was an experience which prompted me to join the Friends of the CNA. I thought I might share this story with others.

On July 9, 2003, I was taking a routine bike ride, this particular evening to Picnic Point, when just beyond the entrance I saw some large moving creatures in my path. I looked up and then saw a woman just ahead, standing quietly, watching me. Her eyes seemed to say, "Stop you fool, this is a reverent moment." Dutifully, I got off my bicycle and looked ahead.

About five feet from me were two adult cranes walking with ethereal grace, moving their heads from side to side. They seemed oblivious to my presence. And then a few feet trailing was a little crane around fifteen inches high trying to keep up the pace. The adult cranes took off slowly and looped back towards the lake, probably off in search of food.

The little one shook its body in imitation and remained grounded. It then looked back towards its parents in disbelief, with an expression that read, "Flying is SO COOL. How do you DO that?"

The baby crane found itself on a path without its parents. And then we looked straight at each other. It looked for its parents once more and then back at me. Then its eyes widened ten-fold, its body stiffened and its soft down stood on end. The terror on the chick's face was animated, like a young Tweety Bird seeing Sylvester for the first time, up close. It then turned towards the bushes, and waddled quickly seeking cover. I heard some rustling in the bushes, then quiet.

With the cranes gone, I got back on my bike, nodded to the other onlooker and resumed my ride up the path. Up ahead, I nearly rammed into a raccoon.

When I got home, I sent an email to a friend, Jane Camerini, who had mentioned something about the FCNA group. I thought she might be able to shed some insight into the three cranes. Sure enough, she wrote, "Great news, Margery. Folks have been hoping for this for several years. We have seen them try to nest, and this spring I saw the adult pair mating. They are wonderful, a joy to see. Thanks for letting me know."

Jane shared my message with Glenda Denniston, an active member of the FCNA I've yet to meet. Glenda provided information about the cranes and attached digital photographs. The pictures were beautiful and appreciated, but left me disconcerted – the colors of the cranes were so different from my memory. For I remember the adult cranes as translucent white.

Why were the birds different in my mind's eye? What does this vision of cranes mean? A haphazard search of cranes and myths on the Internet provided mostly lovely suggestions from varied cultures. "For thousands of years, cranes have been honored for their beauty, ancient ancestry, impressive size and flight." "In many parts of Asia, the cranes are held sacred as symbols of happiness, good luck, long life and peace." Aldo Leopold called the cranes, "no mere bird" but "wilderness incarnate"

([www.magma.nationalgeographic.com/ngm/0404/feature2/](http://www.magma.nationalgeographic.com/ngm/0404/feature2/)).

All fine and good suggestions for meaning, but I have reached an age where I think it best to lay claim to my own experiences, review possibilities and assign my own meanings. Characteristically, I haven't committed to any particular meaning, as yet. Maybe it was dumb luck. Yet, even if it was dumb luck, do I have an ethical responsibility to share my unearned good fortunes?

I've joined the FCNA for a myriad of reasons arising from my encounter with cranes at Picnic Point. I joined in reparation for my existence, an existence that so terrified one cute, young, innocent and rare bird. (Being human can be such an embarrassment.) I joined in appreciation of a group of friends that shed light and shared information about my encounter when I was most curious, and a group which seeks to create a better environment. I joined with gratitude for the experience of such great beauty and wonderment. Mostly my dues were like throwing a penny into a wishing well. I joined with my heartfelt wish that the young crane would learn to fly and grow under the loving wings of its parents and then take off, living a long, healthy and happy life.



First Crane Colt Hatched in the CNA in 100 Years (G. Denniston)