

GUPPY: A FISHY NAME FOR A TRUCK

Marsha Henry Goff

There are times when I think my husband Ray has too much time on his hands. As evidence, he has named the fish in the water garden. Not all 70-plus of them have names . . . yet! However, Ray can recognize each and every one of them. I, on the other hand, can identify only a few: Big Red, Clown and Spot. (What other family, I ask you, has a fish named Spot?)

Some of the birds frequenting the feeders on the deck also have names bestowed by Ray. There's Woody the woodpecker, Dovie the turtledove—my, aren't those names original?—and a downey woodpecker named Morton Downey, Jr. There is also That Silly Fool, a female cardinal who has resumed—for a fourth spring—her practice of slamming into windows despite the preventive measures we have taken. Last year after I wrote about her peculiar behavior, a reader with considerable avian knowledge sent an e-mail message sharing that the cardinal sees her reflection in the window and thinks another female—clearly as aggressive as herself—is invading her territory.

I received one more e-mail—a nasty one—regarding that same column from a male reader who didn't like the name (Dead) which Ray applied to the frog- and goldfish-killing snake who had the bad luck to come after Ray while he was holding a hoe. After reading the irate message which suggested we pave our lawn if snakes weren't welcome, Ray said, "What's the matter with that guy? Doesn't he give a fig about frogs and fish?" Well, O.K., he didn't say "fig," but you get the general idea.

The fact is—if we didn't love animals—would we be feeding half the wildlife population in southeast Douglas County? I think not! However, with sons Ray, Jr. and Greg gone from home, we do draw the line on wildlife actually living under the same roof with us. Over the years, we've shared living space with a turtle named Speedy Gonzales, a duckling called Donald Everett McKinley Duckson, an assortment of snakes (among them, Asclepius the 14-foot Burmese python, Slippery Rock the blacksnake and a western hognose dubbed The Snake with No Name), a piglet named Chet, another piglet named Ginger, and various and sundry dogs, cats, hamsters, mice, gerbils, birds . . . the mind boggles!

When he was in high school, Greg got a lesson in prioritizing the sanctity of life. We came home one evening to find a message from Jim, our neighbor, that one of Greg's snakes had escaped and Jim had trapped it under a washtub. Although he knew that he wasn't missing a snake, Greg grabbed his snake stick, bag and flashlight and hastened to

rescue the snake from its steel prison. While Jim held the flashlight, Greg cautiously lifted the tub and caught a coppery gleam of hourglass banding that marked the snake as a copperhead. He hastily lowered the tub and said, "Mr. Fyne, that's a copperhead!"

Jim took a quick step backward and exclaimed, "Hoo-boy!" Because Ray and I wouldn't allow the boys to capture venomous snakes, Greg attempted to contact his biology teacher to retrieve the snake so its life could be spared. When he failed to reach his teacher, Jim dispatched the copperhead with a hoe (lethal injection not being a practical option).

Greg lamented the copperhead's passing until I sat him down and patiently explained, "Greg, there are children and pets in this neighborhood. The snake was within three feet of their flower garden when Jim captured it under the tub. Estel could have been bitten when she weeded her flowers! Sorry, kid, but people and pets take priority over snakes, especially poisonous ones."

I still feel that way. And I still feel that Ray has too much time on his hands. I submit as further evidence: he doesn't just name fish and birds, he names our vehicles, too. His beloved little tan Toyota four-wheel drive truck was dubbed "Guppy," a fishy name for a truck if ever I heard one! When Guppy was replaced with a new red Toyota pick-up, Ray named Guppy's successor "Guppy Rojo."

Recently, Ray bought a used tractor. I have selected a name for it based on its looks: Pitiful. Although Ray personally calls it Mr. Ugly, he still insists that it is better for a tractor to run well than to look good. I suppose he's right . . . especially if a snake comes after him when he's driving it!