

DESER

The Human Goose

by

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Hyattstown, Md. 20731

Submitted for The Dutton Animal Book Award

O O S K A R

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Dedication:

To Mark Stanley Loeb (1961-1965) and all the other wonderful children who were Oskar's friends or who, given the opportunity, would have been; to all the other Oskars who have been the friends of other children; and to those who will yet be.

Foreword

Saint Francis would have been happy on our farm when, after 15 years, we stopped raising chickens for people to eat. He would have been especially happy with my wife, Lillian, to whom all creatures responded as though she were one of their own. They awarded her a respect, trust and faith that few humans place in or display toward each other.

Our farm is in Western Maryland, within sight of the Blueberry Ridge, at the little unincorporated village of Hyattstown. This beautiful location caused the end of our farming, for it is between two adjacent main roads that careless helicopter pilots used in their lazy navigation between Washington and a number of military and other important installations, like Camp David and President Eisenhower's farm. The chickens could neither abide nor survive their noisy trespasses. I have no doubt that many wild creatures also find them and other blessings of man's modern life equally intolerable.

During our farming we raised many animals of a number of species, including some, like goats, not often seen today. We found in them human-like qualities, captivating, endearing and, really, exciting to a transplanted city man. I am not preaching animism, for I do not insist each animal has what in people is called a soul. But I do say that among some creatures these charming qualities occur with

such frequency and in such abundance as to make one wonder if they enjoyed an earlier and human existence.

Modern scientists have a nomenclature for everything, including things they do not know, cannot prove and, sometimes, do not understand. They have a special, polite, drawing-room profanity for this ascription of human attributes and characteristics to things not human, as though all the good in the world is embodied in and personified by man alone, life's most efficient and indiscriminate predator, who kills his own and other species with a thoroughness and on a scale not equaled in the entire animal kingdom; and who alone kills for "fun" and from hate. That word, which they utter with a mixture of contempt and condescension - sometimes as though it had only four letters - is anthropomorphism.

Perhaps, in this era of consensus, there will never be an accord on this between those scientists who deny animals can and do have human-like characteristics and those of us blessed only with an appreciation of, love for, and life with these animals.

This is the real story of one such creature. It is entirely factual. It is completely without fictional content. It has not been embellished, nor have any of the incidents been created or even exaggerated for the purposes of this story. It is the true story of a wonderful spirited goose who, for the span of his life with us, improved ours by association with and participation in his.

None of the pictures are posed; indeed, few could have been. Unfortunately, much as we wanted to, we could not carry cameras with us all the time. I apologize for the amateurishness of my photography. but in so doing express the hope that it will in a slight measure

enhance the story and help convince the skeptical that it all happened just as I am about to say.