



**Tales from a Sisters Naturalist**

by Jim Anderson

**Ah, the good old days**

My dad was a truck-driver all his life. During the Great Depression he had a tough time making a living, and I can remember him saying to my mom, “Mother, I cannot make a living working for the WPA. I’m going to have to leave and look for better employment. You take the children to the farm while I’m gone.”

And she did. From the time I was 10-years old in 1938 until the beginning of World War II, my dad was gone — I knew not where — but he sent home money to let us know he was alive and working.

I learned how to milk cows, clean the manure out of the troughs in the milk barn, keep the outhouse clean, bathe in the kitchen sink, cut wood to keep warm in winter — and raise

a pet crow.

The crow was my Aunt Dutch’s idea. She named it “Joe-the-Crow.”

The crow knew everyone on the farm by name. One night it caused a calamity no one even dreamed of. My grandmother’s older brother, Joseph Grannis, lived with us on the farm, and one dark night he found it necessary to make a trip to the outhouse. The route from the farmhouse to the barn — the location of the outhouse — was out the back door, down the path under the grape arbor to the outhouse.

While navigating his way through the dark grape arbor he almost literally bumped into Joe-the-Crow who was spending the night in the foliage. Poor Uncle Joe didn’t see the bird, so he was shocked when a voice came out of the darkness, “Hello Joe” so much so, he did his pants...

I learned of this event the next morning listening to my Uncle Joe at the breakfast table complaining over his pancakes and eggs while demanding that Joe-the-Crow find a different place to spend the night.

In fact, that crow had a great deal to do with my curiosity about the nature of the universe around me. It was a mystery to me why he hated my uncle’s pal, Barney

Lutenberger, so much.

During most of the day Joe hung out in the big cherry tree in front of the house. He’d see Barney coming down Jones Hill Road on his bike from his home at the top of the hill. Joe would fly down to the huge hedge between the tree and the roadway where he’d wait for Barney. When he rolled into the yard the crow would dash out and literally get right in Barney’s face, cawing at him and trying to peck his eyes out.

And then there was the scheme my Uncle Horace dreamed up to get Joe to follow us to school.

My three uncles and I would jump on our bikes, (Horace, Harry, Ben and myself), and head off to school, and Horace would invite Joe to join us by offering him cooked clams as we rolled off toward Colonial Park School. Joe was nuts about baked clams and would at times ride on Horace’s handlebars crowing for a handout.

We’d park our bikes at school and hustle off to our classrooms while Joe, all stirred up by the new opportunities he saw for finding illicit food, would go off exploring. All was well until about 10 a.m. and suddenly we’d hear a crow calling, “Oh, Jimmy, Oh, Horace, Oh



PHOTO BY JIM ANDERSON

My son, Dean, now father of five, back when he was a kid caring for one of the many babies I was privileged to raise when I worked at OMSI.

Harry,” and/or, “Oh, Benny.” This would go on as Joe flew from window-to-window at the school.

It drove Miss Kennedy, the eighth-grade teacher nuts. My seventh-grade teacher, Miss Fogerty, would get after me, “Jimmy! If that’s your crow shouting for you, get out there and do something about it!” Doing something about it was getting the clams my Uncle Horace saved, leading Joe back to the farm and then staying out of school for the rest of the day.

I can recall vividly the day Joe went out of our lives. It was the day my Aunt Dutch asked, “Where’s Joe?” adding, “I haven’t seen him for a couple of weeks now.” And

with that she started searching. She looked at all of the outbuildings, concentrating on the hay barn, and after about an hour she suddenly appeared, grinning like the proverbial Cheshire Cat.

“I found Joe!” she declared and his name is now Josephine...”

She was laughing her head off as she added... “She’s setting on eggs over in a nest on a beam coming out from the roof of the hay barn.”

Sure enough, Josephine finished incubating her eggs and conducted her usual pan-handling for all kinds of food scraps to feed her growing brood. She raised ’em up and when they fledged she took them off, never to be seen again.



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The website, developed by Oregon State University, provides COVID-related information and small business resources.

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