

Getting goosed

One evening not long ago, I walked out from our house to get a better view of a full moon rising in the smoke and dust over the mountains. Across the face of the moon I saw the season's first formation of geese. They were flapping along at maybe 500 feet above the valley floor, honking directions and fast food advice to each other, sounding like an orchestra of bicycle horns.

Twenty-some years ago I spent a short time working for a fellow named Shelly in Long Valley, Idaho. Shelly was one of the most honest, fair, friendly fellows I've had the privilege to have as a boss. So friendly, in fact, that his employees had to brace themselves when he was on the job, to keep from getting knocked off their feet when slapped on the back.

His was the only outfit I ever worked for that gave each employee a turkey at both Thanksgiving and at Christmas.

We didn't see much of Shelly in the fall because he was an addicted goose hunter, the kind that isn't enjoying the sport unless he has been laying in a mucky, wet windy blind for eight hours. Late in the afternoon he'd show back up on the job, covered in mud and goose down, smelling and smiling like a golden retriever, to award that day's bag to whomever wanted a 10 pound, un-plucked, un-gutted honker.

Shelly, I miss you. I know that wherever you are, bird season is open, and you are laying out there in a dank pit with your earflaps pulled down, gloveless, squinting into the sunrise, honking away on a celestial

goose call. I've taken a little break from wheelbarrowing concrete uphill to study the book on Canada geese. Hope you don't mind if I introduce my readers to *Branta canadensis moffitti*, the Western Canada Goose.

First the science. They weigh eight to 10 pounds when mature. They eat salads and seeds. There is not much evidence that Canada geese are bug or minnow eaters. When the feed gets scarce, they flap on further south, as far away as the Central Valley in California. Come Spring, the families return to within just a few miles of where they were born, and those that are 2 or more years old pair off for breeding purposes. Once formed, this bond lasts for life, but contrary to folklore, when one of the pair dies, the survivor doesn't pine away. It finds a new mate.

Pairs of nesting honkers are extremely territorial and will actively pursue and harass other members of the flock that stumble onto that turf. They will nest darn near anywhere, on ditch banks, in trees, on cliffs, on muskrat houses but, like me, they prefer to nest on islands. The female lays five or six eggs, incubates them for 28 days, and is pretty much chained to the nest except for short periods in morning and evening when she leaves, accompanied by the male, to eat, bathe and preen. While she is sitting on the nest, the gander stands guard nearby to discourage egg-sucking coyotes, skunks, crows and magpies.

On average, five out of the six eggs

hatch, and both of the parents escort the young to water within 30 hours of birth. For the first week, Mama broods the goslings under her wings at night, but even though The Old Man is standing by to hiss and flap his wings at critters wanting to snarf up the little geese, there is a 20 percent loss of goslings between hatching and when they are able to fly away from danger themselves 60 days later.

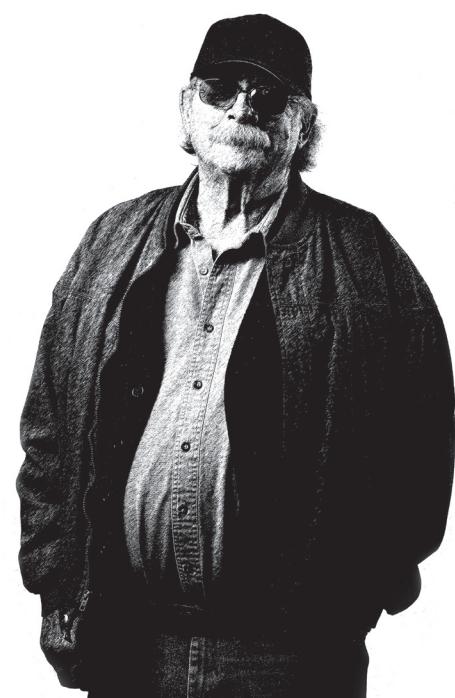
Kids will be kids. While all this domestic stuff is going on, the yearlings and the unpaired 2-year-olds that are not sexually active take a cruise to a sort of reverse Daytona Beach for single geese in the Beverly and Aberdeen lakes region west of Hudson Bay. There, in flocks as large as 50,000, young Canada geese from across North America spend a month listening to rock and roll and undergoing a wing molt, losing and replacing the large flight feathers on the trailing edges of their wings. During that time they are not very efficient fliers and the Arctic foxes fatten up.

Meanwhile, back on the home front, Mom and Pop are molting in between loads of diapers, and are strong flying machines again by the time the new quadruplets are ready for aerial lessons. About this time the teenagers show up, back in their home territory, and the family gathers up to head south.

Western Canada geese are notoriously late to leave their breeding grounds. Seeing a v-line of Canada geese in the fall is usually a good sign that humans who plan to winter above the 45th parallel should be out cutting firewood because breeding season is over, the chicks are up, healthy, on the wing, and it is time to head south. Snow is not far off.

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J.D. SMITH
FROM THE HEADWATERS
OF DRY CREEK

families dominate the smaller families, that dominate the pairs, that dominate the individual orphans. When the sub-flocks gather into larger flocks to begin the migration from the breeding grounds to the wintering grounds, the lead goose in a flying formation is usually going to be the largest gander of the largest family, and that same goose will fly point through the entire migration. Unless, of course, it makes the fatal error of suckering into Shelly's stand of decoys and ends up in the back of a pickup, riding to destiny with the caulk, nail guns, and pier blocks.

Trump is compromised by Russia

By MICHELLE GOLDBERG
New York Times Columnist

One of the chief questions in the Trump-Russia scandal has been whether Vladimir Putin has leverage over the president of the United States, and, if so, what that leverage looks like. The significance of the fabled "pee tape," after all, is not that it would reveal Donald Trump to be a pervert bent on defiling the place where Barack Obama slept. Rather, the tape matters because, if real, it would show the president to be vulnerable to Russian blackmail.

That's also why evidence of Trump's business involvement with Russia would be significant, as Trump himself acknowledged shortly before his inauguration, when he tweeted, "Russia has never tried to use leverage over me. I HAVE NOTHING TO DO WITH RUSSIA — NO DEALS, NO LOANS, NO NOTHING!"

We still don't know for certain if Russia has used leverage over Trump. But there should no longer be any doubt that Russia has leverage over him.

On Thursday morning, Trump's former lawyer Michael Cohen — the former executive vice president of the Trump Organization — pleaded guilty to making false statements to Congress about efforts to build a Trump-branded property in Moscow that extended into the 2016 presidential campaign.

In an August 2017 letter to the House and Senate intelligence committees, Cohen said that the Moscow project ended in January 2016. He claimed not to recall contacts with Russian government officials about a potential deal. Cohen told Congress that he spoke about the project with Trump — identified as "Individual 1" in the criminal information document that Robert Mueller, the special counsel, filed Thursday — only three times. He said he never briefed Trump's family.

According to Mueller's filing, all of this was false. Efforts to obtain Russian government approval for a Trump-branded development in Moscow went on until "approximately June 2016," after Trump had effectively secured the Republican nomination for president. Cohen, Mueller's document said, "discussed the status and progress of the Moscow project with Individual 1" more than three times. He also "briefed family members of Individual

1 within the company about the project."

In January 2016, according to Mueller's document, Cohen had a 20-minute conversation with the assistant to a Russian official in which he sought Russia's help moving the project forward. The next day, Felix Sater, a Trump associate identified in the court filing as "Individual 2," wrote Cohen to tell him he'd heard from Putin's office. Cohen made plans to travel to Russia, calling them off only on June 14, which happened to be the day that *The Washington Post* first reported that Russian government hackers had penetrated Democratic National Committee computers. At one point, Cohen and Sater were also coordinating with figures in Moscow about a potential Trump visit in connection with the project.

So we now know that Trump lied to the American people about at least one part of his business relationship with Russia, a geopolitical foe that interfered in our election process on his behalf.

In a Jan. 11, 2017, news conference, Trump said that the "closest I came to Russia" was in selling a Palm Beach mansion to a Russian oligarch in 2008. While we're just learning precisely how dishonest this was, Putin has known it all along. That means that throughout Trump's campaign and presidency, Putin has had the power to plunge him into political crisis.

"If the Russians are aware that senior American officials are publicly stating things that are not true, it's a counterintelligence nightmare," Rep. Adam Schiff, D-Calif, who is in line to take over the House Intelligence Committee, told me.

As he points out, this issue contributed to former national security adviser Michael Flynn's downfall. Flynn, you might remember, appeared to have lied to Vice President Mike Pence about his conversations with the Russian ambassador. This alarmed Sally Yates, then the acting attorney general, because the Russians would have known that Flynn was deceiving Pence, and could have used that knowledge against him. "Logic would tell you that you don't want the national security adviser to be in a position where the Russians have leverage over him," Yates told the Senate last year.

The same, said Schiff, "is true in spades for the president of the United States."

Speaking to reporters before flying to Argentina on Thursday, Trump justified his pursuit of a Moscow project this way: "There was a good chance that I wouldn't have won, in which case I would have gotten back into the business, and why should I lose lots of opportunities?" This could be read as a confession of motive. In the 2016 campaign, Russia wanted to



humiliate Hillary Clinton and delegitimize America's election. Trump wanted help building his brand.

In light of some other recent revelations in the Mueller inquiry, we can even see Trump getting talking points, albeit indirectly, from Moscow.

This week, Jerome Corsi, a right-wing conspiracy theorist who appears to have been a conduit between the Trump campaign and WikiLeaks, released a copy of what he said was a draft statement of offense against him, given to him during plea negotiations with Mueller. On Aug. 2, 2016, Corsi wrote to Roger Stone, the political dirty trickster in frequent contact with Trump, about the "word" on coming document dumps from WikiLeaks. "Would not hurt to start suggesting HRC old, memory bad, has stroke," wrote Corsi.

Shortly afterward, Trump started making sustained attacks on Clinton's purported lack of "mental and physical stamina." (Corsi has since said, on MSNBC, that his apparent foreknowledge of WikiLeaks' plans came through a flash of divine intervention on a trans-Atlantic flight.)

There are still many shoes to drop in this scandal. "Given the extraordinary obsequiousness the president has shown in his relationship with Putin, it begs the question of whether there's more leverage than this," said Schiff. "That's one of the reasons why we're so determined to make sure that we look into any credible allegations of financial entanglements, whether that involves potential Russian money laundering in the Trump Organization or anything else."

But even before those inquiries begin, we can see that Putin has been in possession of crucial information about Trump's business interests that the president deliberately hid from the American people. In a normal political world, Republicans would have enough patriotism to find this alarming and humiliating. Every day of the Trump presidency is a national security emergency. The question now is whether Senate Republicans, who could actually do something about it, will ever be moved to care.

Michelle Goldberg became an Op-Ed columnist for *The New York Times* in 2017 and was part of a team that won a Pulitzer Prize in 2018 for public service for reporting on workplace sexual harassment issues.

The ethical problems with creating gene-edited babies

Los Angeles Times

It has long been a scientific dream: to inoculate people against terrible diseases before they're born. Now a team of doctors based in China has dangled that possibility in front of us by claiming it has edited the DNA of two human embryos during in vitro fertilization. The goal of the project was to protect the two (who are now twin baby girls) from HIV, the virus that causes AIDS.

If this was intended to be a gift to the world, though, it came in ugly wrapping. The principal investigator didn't bother with such scientific protocols as peer review and publishing in a respected journal. Instead, he made claims about his results

informally to a colleague at a conference, during an interview to *The Associated Press*, and posted a video on YouTube. He offered no evidence or independent corroboration that his experiment succeeded.

And if indeed it did take place as described, it unquestionably crossed all sorts of ethical and safety lines.

The reaction was explosive. The hospital named in documents filed by researcher He Jiankui says that neither the research nor the birth of the twins happened there. The Chinese government, though it has not outlawed genetic experimentation on human embryos, launched an investigation into the ethics of the project. More than 100 Chinese scientists issued

a statement condemning He's actions, saying his team harmed the reputation of research coming from their nation.

Until now, research on gene editing has been restricted to faulty embryos in cases in which it was clear that children would be born with horrible illnesses. Even then, such research has been hotly debated, as it should be. While it is tremendously exciting to think that researchers might be able one day to switch off genes that predispose to breast cancer, say, or Alzheimer's disease, gene editing raises all sorts of other troubling questions. Even leaving aside people's worries about eugenics and genetically designed superbabies bred for certain looks or athletic skills,

there's also the fact that gene editing isn't just another treatment for an individual; it's a process that changes the human genome; if successful, it will be passed on to future generations and spread through the population.

In some cases, that could be a good thing. But there could also be unintended consequences that might more than offset any positive effects. Gene editing can accidentally change genes other than those targeted in ways scientists can't foresee. Or, in the case of the latest research claim, *The Associated Press* reported that the work involved disabling a gene that allows HIV to enter cells. The problem, it further reported, is that people who lack the normal version of that gene have higher

risks of dying from flu or falling ill with West Nile virus. ... The new research claim is especially disturbing because, although the father of the twins is HIV positive, the chance of transmission was small.

This experiment on human children might or might not help prevent a disease that they were unlikely to have gotten away, and which is preventable through other means as well as treatable.

The ethical (and practical) concerns raised by such experiments are complex and far reaching.

Of course, it's hoped that one day, when our knowledge of gene editing and its consequences is deeper, we won't need such restrictions.