



SKATING ON THIN ICE

It was mid-January and the temperature was in the single digits when we received a call from the Park Service. There was a Canada Goose on a small community pond that appeared to be frozen into the ice. Staffer Dave Williams took the call and realized the pond was just a block from Chris's townhouse. He drove over to check out the situation and returned to the Center to confirm that the goose was, indeed, in trouble. We always caution people not to jeopardize their own safety attempting to rescue an animal and, this time, we had to take our own advice. How could we safely get out to the middle of a frozen pond to reach the goose? Rehab colleague Brian Kristal thought he had the solution; a neighbor had a 12 foot flat-bottomed boat that we could use to "pole" ourselves across the ice. If the ice broke, we would be safe in the boat. He offered to assist in the venture.

At about 11:30 PM, Brian met the Second Chance staff, Dave, Polly and Chris, at the pond. The homeowner who had notified the Park Service of the goose's plight was there to greet the rescuers. It was agreed that the two men would try to make their way across the ice while Polly and Chris stayed on shore holding the rope that was attached to the boat. Once the goose was in hand, the rope would allow the women to assist in hauling the boat back to shore.

Brian had brought some strong dowels thinking that they could be used to propel the boat. Unfortunately, moving forward was easier said than done. The two guys soon found that if they sat down and "scooted," they could move the boat forward a few inches at a time. With Brian calling cadence, they slowly moved out toward the center of the pond leaving Polly and Chris holding their sides trying not to laugh too loudly at the spectacle.

As the guys neared the goose, they realized it was actually sitting on open water. Her mate was nervously circling on the edge of the ice. One can only imagine what he must have been thinking as he watched this strange creature creeping across the ice toward his mate. As Polly and Chris stood on the shore with their feet slowly going numb from the cold, they felt great empathy for the poor goose; what must she be going through? Finally, the boat was close enough for Dave to net the goose and lift her into the boat. She put up no resistance, accepting her fate. At that point, the guys were on open water. Scooting a boat from water back up onto ice would have been nearly impossible if not for the rope. Polly and Chris gave a mighty pull which did very little. Thankfully, the homeowner came over and, with his help, the boat, crew and goose slowly advanced toward the shore. As soon as the "SS Minnow" had landed, Polly and Chris loaded the half-frozen goose into the car and drove it to Chris's house. Fluids were administered by injection under the skin and the kennel was placed on a heating pad. The bird's breathing was labored; it probably had pneumonia. It was midnight and further treatment would have to wait until morning.

The following morning, the goose was delivered to Second Chance and given a more thorough examination. She was extremely weak and emaciated, and the respiratory noises were of particular concern. Geese are extremely prone to fungal infection, especially if they have been stressed by severe weather. This winter couldn't have been much more severe. We decided to start the goose on an anti-fungal along with an antibiotic. A large kennel was prepared and she was settled in with fresh water and food. She weighed just over 9 pounds.

Three days later, the goose was still not eating on her own. She had lost one pound and had a discharge from her nostrils. In addition, her left eye was weepy. We added an antibiotic ophthalmic ointment to her medication and began tube feeding an easily digestible liquid formula. When an animal, or person, becomes severely emaciated, their bodies are often not able to process solid food. In advanced cases of starvation, the internal organs shut down and the animal is doomed. We crossed our fingers and hoped our efforts on the ice would not be in vain.

By the end of the month, the goose was still not eating but her strength was beginning to return. We had turned the corner. The goose finally began eating and rapidly regained her strength. Of course, by now, we were deep into a severe winter. There was nothing we could do but wait until Spring to release her. She was placed with other geese in similar situations and settled in to wait out the cold.

Winter began to loosen its icy grip toward the end of March. On April 3, a truly beautiful spring day, the pond that had nearly been her death trap was a very busy place. Birds were singing in the trees, turtles were basking in the sun and everywhere Canada Geese were setting up housekeeping and preparing for the arrival of this year's goslings. She had spent the winter with several other geese, one of which could not go back where it was found, so we packed both of them in a kennel and headed for the pond and freedom. When the birds were released, they hit the water and flew from one end of the pond to the other amid much honking and splashing. They quickly blended in with the resident goose population and it was virtually impossible to tell which were ours. They were obviously perfectly comfortable. She will have all summer to fatten up and prepare for whatever the next winter has in store for us. Hopefully, she will be better prepared to handle what nature throws at her.

Ordinarily, Second Chance does not have the resources to attempt this sort of rescue. This was a situation where we were able to call on a colleague and citizens in order to save an animal. This is not a rescue that should be attempted by individuals. The risk was great and the rescue would not have been attempted if we were not reasonably sure that we were not putting our own lives in danger. It was an experience that we will not soon forget, and can now laugh about, and we are most grateful that the heroic efforts of Dave and Brian were, ultimately, successful.

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