

A Yuletide Turtle Tale

I save turtles.

It goes way back.

Something my parents taught me.

Somehow the odds of a tiny turtle pitted against 18-wheelers whizzing by at 75 mph seem to demand benevolent intervention and rescue.

My daughter and I saved many a turtle en route to Indian Princess campouts. Once a huge snapper from Lake Apopka nearly removed a couple of my fingers in gratitude for his deliverance.

My wife used to rescue fish which were flopping around on the sand beached by sudden low tides, returning them to the water.

Same basic concept.

She readily adapted to my turtle-saving tradition.

Recently, as we were motoring down Tivoli Drive near one of Deltona's many lakes, we saw a box turtle clambering down an embankment toward the busy thoroughfare. His chances of making it across safely were remote.

"Stop!" I cried.

My wife pulled over and I jumped out and ran back. Fortunately, there was a break in the traffic, and I was able to snare the little fellah just as his front toes were hitting the pavement.

I carried him back to the top of the embankment and pointed him down the hill in the other direction, toward the lake and safety.

Having done my good deed for the day, I hurried back to the car. My wife was laughing.

"What's so funny?" I demanded.

"Look."

She pointed back. The turtle had pulled a 180 and was charging back down the bank toward the busy road.

Sighing, I ran back and repeated the rescue operation.

Twice.

I was beginning to lose patience. We were late getting somewhere. This was becoming ridiculous. How many times were we obligated to keep saving this little guy who was so hell-bent on self-destruction?

On the fourth try, I lost it. I mean, RESCUING turtles is one thing-- but TALKING to them?

"This is the last time, you ungrateful little #@%&! If you come back again, you're on your own!"

This time, I carried him halfway down the hill to the lake, clawing my way through the palmetto and ripping my pants in the process.

"OK, that's it. Now GO to the lake!"

As if he were listening.

My wife and I were down the road a pace, still shaking our heads, when she looked at me and observed, "Now we know how God feels."

I let that sink in for a minute.

Perhaps we should all take a moment at Christmastime to ponder the tale of the turtle. And maybe, just maybe, we can make it to the lake.

-Dan Voss