That Pond

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It was always referred to as “that pond.” “Stay away from that pond, it’s really, really deep.” “That pond has a giant snapping turtle in it that will eat you if you fall in.” “Don’t even think of swimming in that pond.” It was the 1950’s and we roamed our farm unattended during the day and came back to the house when my mom rang the big dinner bell in the yard. My parents faced a challenge to keep four little kids out of “that pond.”

Of all the kids, my brother Pat and I were the most tempted by that pond. We were only eleven months apart in age and functioned like twins. We played carefully along the bank most of the year, wondering about what mysteries it held. One winter when we were five and six, we had a big freeze. Even that spring fed pond froze over. It was really tempting to edge out onto the frozen pond. We inched out and noticed an opening where the bubbling spring kept the ice from forming.

We talked it over and decided not to get too close to the opening. We decided instead to raid the corn crib and gather ears of corn to throw into the spring opening. With practice, we became good at throwing the corn into the hole. We did have some near misses along the edge of the spring hole, and we left that corn for another time.

As we left that pond, one of our large sows lumbered by us. We raised Duroc hogs and they were often free roaming. During the heat of summer, they enjoyed floating in the pond, with only their nose, ears, and eyes showing. It never occurred to us that she might be attracted to the corn lying along the edge of the spring hole. We watched her slowly walk out toward the corn and the spring opening. As she ate the corn, she moved closer and closer to the ears near the spring hole. We heard a loud cracking sound as the ice gave way and watched her disappear into the spring hole.

We ran screaming to the house to tell our Dad that a hog had fallen in the pond. He ran back to the pond with us, but no one could see any sign of her. Suddenly, she came up for a quick breath of air at the spring hole and then went under. The ice was clear so we could see a red shadow swimming away from the opening. Our Dad quickly found an axe and began chopping a hole where she was swimming. He broke through the ice, and she surfaced for a quick breath of air and then went under again, swimming away from the two openings.

This effort was repeated a number of times, and each time after a quick breath, she swam away from what might have been her salvation. We were watching our now exhausted Dad, both thinking he was going to have a heart attack. After chopping a

number of holes, our Dad stopped. He could see her body pinned under the ice, dead. He sent us back to the house and managed to finally get her to the surface.

As we walked back to the house, Pat and I looked at one another and agreed that if asked, we had no idea why that 300-pound hog would be out walking on that pond. A sow was a big investment on a farm in those days, and we realized that it was a big loss.

My Dad came back to the house and called the local garbage truck driver, known to us as Colored Louie. That name differentiated him from our Dad, Louie, and our older brother, Little Louie. Colored Louie arrived with some friends and managed to get the sow onto dry land. He then proceeded to expertly butcher her, with Pat and me hovering close by.

Pat and I both felt guilty eating pork that year. Sometimes, when eating ham, my dad would wonder aloud about what would have motivated the sow to venture out onto that frozen pond. No one ever directly asked us, and we remained, for the rest of our lives, clueless about her motivation.

Sometimes, when Pat and I reminisce about childhood memories of the farm, the topic of the sow will come up. One of us will quietly say, “I wonder why she walked out to the spring hole on that frozen pond.” The other will shrug and look mystified. Just another mystery of “that pond.”