

Fish Can Feel Too

When I was a boy a fellow could earn pin money by snaring gophers with binder twine. The tails were worth one cent each and even after the municipality stopped the payment my Grandfather continued to pay me bounty. The alternative was poison and he hated the shotgun results of poison.

One day, with time on my hands, I led one of the gophers (Richardson's Ground Squirrel to be correct) home on the end of my snare instead of killing the creature outright. The thing fought and chewed and tugged till it was near to death and about then my Grandfather caught me at the game. Details are vague but I never again tormented a creature.

Another boyhood recollection is of a surly lout of a man known throughout the district as the man able to get the least possible cooperation from any horse he owned. One day my father, a gentle man detesting all forms of violence, found this clod beating a horse with the small end of a logging chain.

To my astonishment Father stepped over, yanked the chain from the man's hands, and threw it on the ground. A battle was imminent and my Father, pale and distraught, wanted none of it. Fortunately cooler heads prevailed and the bully was ushered away.

Why, I wanted to know, did Dad get himself into that predicament in the first place. His answer was clear and I've never forgotten. "Sometimes son," he said, "a man has to do things he doesn't want to do just because it's the right thing to do. We've got responsibilities in this world that are more important than our personal feelings."

Those two examples, it seems to me, form the framework of a philosophy toward life, and the world, and the world's creatures that is absolutely essential in a civilized society.

(continued)

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