

TURTLES (AGAIN)

I've written about turtles for The Mirror before, in July of 1996. That's a long time ago, so I feel I can write about them again without boring readers any more than I usually do. I think the reason I admire turtles so much is that they're so ill-equipped to adapt, yet so far have managed to survive. This I have in common with the turtle.

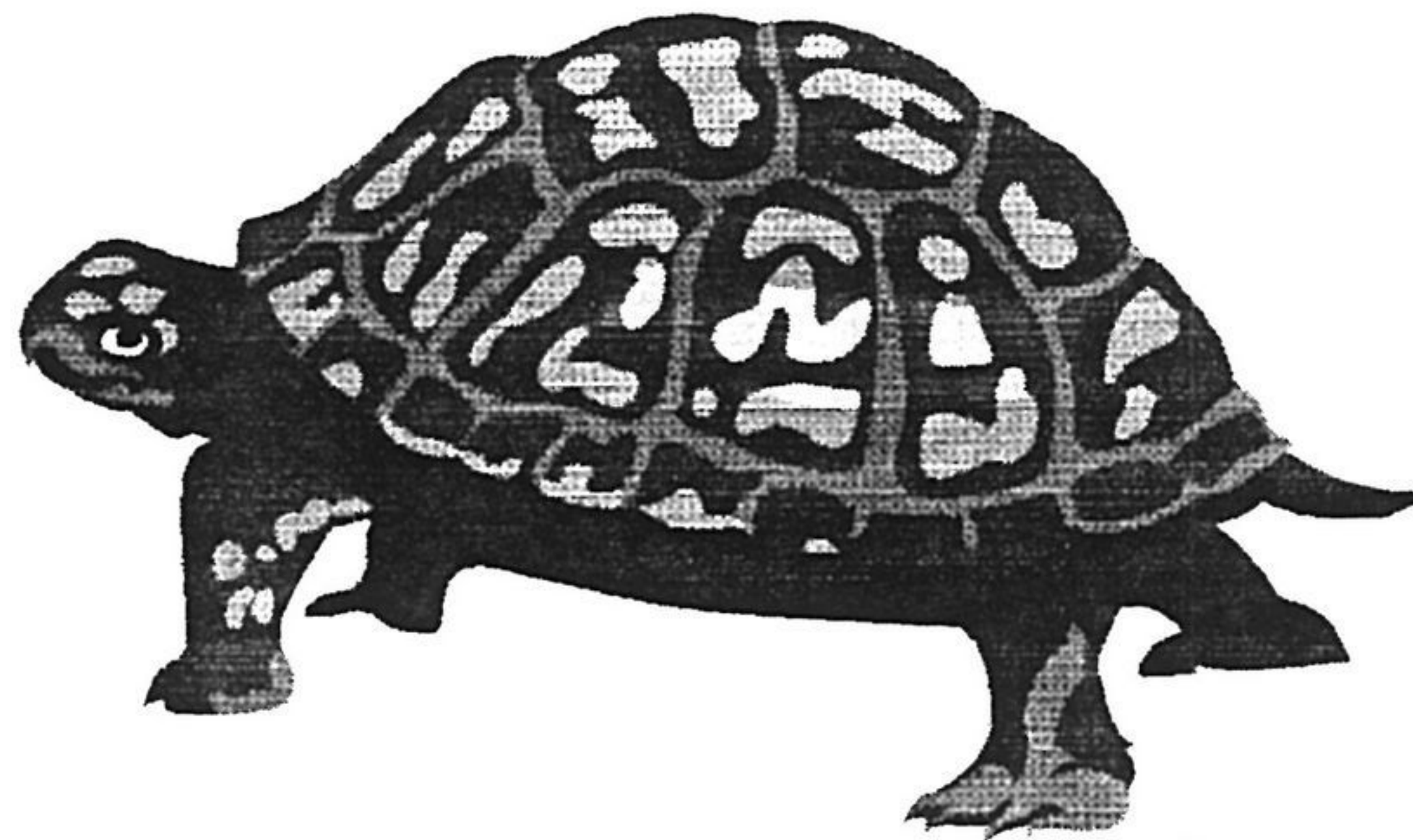
Now is the time when turtles are wandering about seeking what they consider to be the perfect spot to lay their eggs. They're attempting to cross highways, lumbering through our gardens, and often making tragic choices when selecting the site to deposit their contribution to future turtle generations.

Because turtles lay their eggs and never return, they have no way of judging whether they have selected a successful spot. Year after year, a given turtle will make the identical mistake because they seem to return to more or less the same location.

Katy, in Bloomfield, tells me that, last year, a snapper lumbered up from the mill pond through an entire row of fledgling carrots, laid her eggs, then headed back to the mill pond through the second row. Her husband says at harvest, the carrot yield was six lonely carrots. This year, she homed in on her herb garden. On a mound laden with carefully planted aromatic herbs Mrs. Snapper found the spot she sought, ripped and tore it all apart, dug a deep hole, and left her eggs. No doubt the turtle felt this sweet smelling location was ideal, but is this any way to make friends? And turtles need all the friends they can get.

I live in the last house along Wil-O-Lea Road, a one kilometer gravel dead end street. Snappers and painted turtles creep up from the marsh and the bay, locate this wide strip of gravel road, and in their prehistoric ill-adapted minds, conclude this is a perfect spot to lay their eggs. On Friday, June 12, at three o'clock, a beautifully decorated old lady painted turtle crept up from the lake, around my house, across my front lawn, and located the centre of the gravel turnaround on the dead-end. Perfect, she thought.

It was time for intervention, because I felt she couldn't possibly dig a hole deep enough in the hard pan, and for sure cars would be turning around on the dead



end and squishing her eggs. As she had only scratched the surface of the road, I picked her up and placed her in our garden, where there's lots of soft warm earth that's diggable. Turtles don't appreciate help. When I picked her up she hissed in anger, and peed on me as turtles will, but I'm more or less fully evolved, and recognize that she'd appreciate the help if she could but grasp what I was trying to do.

An hour later I looked out on the road, and sure enough, there in the centre of the turnaround, the old lady was digging her hole again. She'd now managed to progress an inch or two in depth. If I moved her again, maybe she'd just go to the same spot, or maybe she'd be so exhausted that she wouldn't have enough energy to dig a deep enough hole. It seemed wisest to let her continue. I fetched a couple of large white pails and placed them on either side of her so that an unwitting motorist wouldn't flatten her. As I did this, she pulled back into her shell and glared at me. I know when I left she was congratulating herself on how easy it was to intimidate and outwit me. It is actually, but it takes more than a turtle to do it.

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