

Lessons From The Geese

As each goose flaps its wings, it creates an "uplift" for the bird following. By flying in a "V" formation, the whole flock adds 71% more flying range than if each bird flew alone.

Lesson: People who share a common direction and sense of community can get where they are going quicker and easier because they are traveling on the thrust of one another.

Whenever a goose falls out of formation, it suddenly feels the drag and resistance of trying to fly alone, and quickly gets back into formation to take advantage of the "lifting power" of the bird immediately in front.

Lesson: If we have as much sense as a goose, we will join in formations with those who are headed where we want to go.

When the lead goose gets tired, it rotates back into the formation and another goose flies at the point position.

Lesson: It pays to take turns doing the hard tasks and sharing leadership – with people, as with geese, interdependent with one other.

The geese in formation honk from behind to encourage those up front to keep up their speed.

Lesson: We need to make sure our honking from behind is encouraging - not something less helpful.

When a goose gets sick or wounded or shot down, two geese drop out of formation and follow their fellow member down to help provide protection. They stay with this member of the flock until he or she is either able to fly again or dies. Then they launch out on their own, with another formation, or catch up with their own flock.

Lesson: If we have as much sense as the geese, we'll stand by each other like that.

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THE YOUNG MAN AND THE STARFISH MAKING A DIFFERENCE

Once there was a great storm that washed thousands of starfish up onshore. As an old man walked the beach he saw a young boy picking up stranded starfish and quickly returning them to the sea.

The man approached the boy and said, "What are you doing? The sun is rapidly rising. What difference does it make? They're all going to die anyway."

As the boy rose from picking up another starfish he said, "What difference does it make? It will make a difference to this one. "Then he turned and set the starfish free.



Eight Cow Wife

My trip to the Kiniwata Island in the Pacific was a memorable one. Although the island was beautiful and I had an enjoyable time, the thing I remember most about my trip was the fact "Johnny Lingo gave eight cows for his wife." I'm reminded of it every time I see a woman belittle her husband or a wife wither under her husband's scorn. I want to say to them, "You should know *why* Johnny Lingo gave eight cows for his wife."

Johnny Lingo is known throughout the islands for his skills, intelligence, and savvy. If you hire him as a guide, he will show you the best fishing spots and the best places to get pearls. Johnny is also one of the sharpest traders in the islands. He can get you the best possible deals. The people of Kiniwata all speak highly of Johnny Lingo. Yet, when they speak of him, they always smile just a little mockingly.

A couple days after my arrival to Kiniwata, I went to the manager of the guesthouse to see who he thought would be a good fishing guide. "Johnny Lingo," said the manager. "He's the best around. When you go shopping, let him do the bargaining. Johnny knows how to make a deal."

"Johnny Lingo!" hooted a nearby boy. The boy rocked with laughter as he said, "Yea, Johnny can make a deal alright!"

"What's going on?" I demanded.

"Everybody tells me to get in touch with Johnny Lingo and then they start laughing. Please, let me in on the joke."

"Oh, the people like to laugh," the manager said, shrugging. "Johnny's the brightest and strongest young man in the islands. He's also the richest for his age."

"But ..." I protested. "... if he's all you say he is, why does everyone laugh at him behind his back?"

"Well, there is one thing. Five months ago, at fall festival, Johnny came to Kiniwata and found himself a wife. He gave her father eight cows!"

I knew enough about island customs to be impressed. A dowry of two or three cows would net a fair wife and four or five cows would net a very nice wife.

"Wow!" I said. "Eight cows! She must have beauty that takes your breath away."

"She's not ugly, ..." he conceded with a little smile, "... but calling her 'plain' would definitely be a compliment. Sam Karoo, her father, was afraid he wouldn't be able to marry her off. Instead of being stuck with her, he got eight cows for her. Isn't that extraordinary? This price has never been paid before."

"Yet, you called Johnny's wife 'plain?' "

"I said it would be a compliment to call her plain. She was skinny and she walked with her shoulders hunched and her head ducked. She was scared of her own shadow."

"Well," I said, "I guess there's just no accounting for love."

"True enough." agreed the man. "That's why the villagers grin when they talk about Johnny. They get special satisfaction from the fact the sharpest trader in the islands was bested by dull old Sam Karoo."

"But how?"

"No one knows and everyone wonders. All of the cousins urged Sam to ask for three cows and hold out for two until he was sure Johnny would pay only one. To their surprise Johnny came to Sam Karoo and said, 'Father of Sarita, I offer eight cows for your daughter.' "

"Eight cows." I murmured. "I'd like to meet this Johnny Lingo."

I wanted fish and pearls, so the next afternoon I went to the island of Nurabandi. As I asked directions to Johnny's house, I noticed Johnny's neighbors were also amused at the mention of his name. When I met the slim, serious young man I could see immediately why everyone respected his skills. However, this only reinforced my confusion over him.

As we sat in his house, he asked me, "You come here from Kiniwata?"

"Yes."

"They speak of me on that island?"

"Yes. They say you can provide me anything I need. They say you're intelligent, resourceful, and the sharpest trader in the islands."

He smiled gently. "My wife is from Kiniwata."

"Yes, I know."

"They speak of her?"

"A little."

"What do they say?"

"Why, just" The question caught me off balance. "They told me you were married at festival time."

"Nothing more?" The curve of his eyebrows told me he knew there had to be more.

"They also say the marriage settlement was eight cows." I paused. "They wonder why."

"They ask that?" His eyes lighted with pleasure. "Everyone in Kiniwata knows about the eight cows?"

I nodded.

"And in Nurabandi, everyone knows it too?" His chest expanded with satisfaction. "Always and forever, when they speak of marriage settlements, it will be remembered that Johnny Lingo paid eight cows for Sarita."

So that's the answer, I thought: Vanity.

Just then Sarita entered the room to place flowers on the table. She stood still for a moment to smile at her husband and then left. She was the most beautiful woman I have ever seen. The lift of her shoulders, the tilt of her chin, and the sparkle in her eyes all spelled self-confidence and pride. Not an arrogant and haughty pride, but a confident inner beauty that radiated in her every movement.



I turned back to Johnny and found him looking at me.

"You admire her?" he murmured.

"She ... she's gorgeous." I said. "Obviously, this is not the one everyone is talking about. She can't be the Sarita you married on Kiniwata."

"There's only one Sarita. Perhaps, she doesn't look the way you expected."

"She doesn't. I heard she was homely. They all make fun of you because you let yourself be cheated by Sam Karoo."

"You think eight cows was too many?" A smile slid over his lips.

"No, but how can she be so different from the way they described her?"

Johnny said, "Think about how it must make a girl feel to know her husband paid a very low dowry for her? It must be insulting to her to know he places such little value on her. Think about how she must feel when the other women boast about the high prices their husbands paid for them. It must be embarrassing for her. I would not let this happen to my Sarita."

"So, you paid eight cows just to make your wife happy?"

"Well, of course I wanted Sarita to be happy, but there's more to it than that. You say she is different from what you expected. This is true. Many things can change a woman. There are things that happen on the inside and things that happen on the outside. However, the thing that matters most is how she views herself. In Kiniwata, Sarita believed she was worth nothing. As a result, that's the value she projected. Now, she knows she is worth more than any other woman in the islands. It shows, doesn't it?"

"Then you wanted ..."

"I wanted to marry Sarita. She is the only woman I love."

"But ..." I was close to understanding.

"But," he finished softly, "I wanted an eight-cow wife."

The above story was based partially on an article found in *Reader's Digest* (February, 1988). The original work was copyrighted by Patricia McGerr in 1965.

Shouting

In the Solomon Islands in the South Pacific some villagers practice a unique form of cutting trees down. If a tree is too large to be cut with an ax, the natives cut it down by shouting at it. Men with special powers get on the tree just in the early morning hours and suddenly scream at it at the top of their lungs. After thirty days of doing this, the tree dies and falls over. The villagers' theory is that the screaming kills the spirit of the tree and, according to them, it always works.

“Ah, those poor naïve innocents!” some people in our Western societies may think. “Screaming at trees, indeed! How primitive! Don't they realize that trees can't hear us?” Our first reaction is to think that we do not do things like this any longer because we have a scientific, logical mind and we use highly sophisticated machines.

But, however scientific, logical and technologically prepared we may be, haven't you ever seen anyone screaming at things at the top of their lungs? For instance, I shout at the taxis and the buses and the telephone. People have told me that they have seen me yelling at the sky at times. The man next door yells at his car a lot. Last summer I heard him yell at his video VCR when it stopped working and he usually yells at his TV set while watching football matches. But, what's worst, I also shout at my wife, often just because I am in a bad mood, and my neighbor yells at his children when they are playing on the street. In the end, we realize that machines and relatives get most of the yelling we, urban educated people, do.

And we may ask ourselves: “Does this shouting help at all?” If machines and things cannot hear us and just sit there, is our yelling more logical than the Solomon way of cutting trees down? The Solomon Islanders, however, may have a point that we should keep in mind before shouting at the people we love most: Shouting at living things may kill the spirit in them.