

## **The True Story of Edgar Allen Crow**

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One morning while I was walking my dogs at Day Street Park I threw a few crumbs of dog cookies to some pigeons. Suddenly a crow swooped down, scared the pigeons away, ate the remaining crumbs and stared at me. Soft touch that I am, I threw the bird a whole cookie, which he grabbed in his beak and flew away.

The next morning, when I reached the same place in the park, a crow flew down to the lawn on the other side of the fence, and cawed. So I threw him a dog cookie.

This went on for several days. First it was just one crow, then two crows, then several crows meeting me in the park and receiving from me first bits of dog cookies, then bits of bread, cheese, chicken and beef.

From the park I always walk up 30<sup>th</sup> Street to a place we call 'Billy Goat Hill.' Two crows, a pair I called 'Amos' and 'Andrea,' began following me. They would fly from telephone pole to telephone pole. There's a concrete road divider at the bottom of Billy Goat Hill. I began placing some food on this concrete fence. Soon several crows were feeding there. And then some big 'crows' started coming. These bigger birds were, I learned, ravens. The crows would come only within 10 or 15 feet of me. But the ravens came quite close, sometimes within 2 or 3 feet.

I wondered if I had something long to hold out to the, long enough so my fingers wouldn't be in danger, they might eat from my hand. So the next morning I brought a hot dog, and when I held it out, one of the ravens came right up and ate from my hand.

I could now tell the difference between crows and ravens, but I couldn't tell one crow or one raven from another—except by their behavior, especially the one fearless raven that ate hot dogs from my hand. This bird began following me along Laidley Street, not just flying from pole to pole or roof to roof, but sometimes walking on the sidewalk behind me and my dogs.

One day, as I held out a hot dog, the raven seemed to wink his left eye at me. I thought, "Well, this guy seems friendly enough. I wonder what he'll do if I put a piece of hot dog on my outstretched arm." When I did this, the bird immediately jumped onto my arm and ate the piece of hot dog. I stood with my arm outstretched and looked at him. He was only a foot or so from my face, and was looking back at me.

I said, "That's it. You got your hot dog."

The raven croaked. But to my amazement this croak sounded like the word 'more.'

I said, "Did you say 'more'?"

The raven croaked again. "More, more, more."

I held out another hot dog and let the bird take the whole thing, which it did and flew away. I thought, I'm getting old. My imagination is too active. I had too many beers last night. I didn't get enough sleep. I asked my dogs if that bird had really said 'more.' The dogs didn't know. They had been paying attention to a squirrel.

The next morning I came to Billy Goat Hill early. Well, I was very curious. The raven suddenly swooped down from a tree, landed next to me, looked up, and said, "What's for breakfast?"

I glanced around. There was nobody else in sight. I looked at this large black bird, and he looked at me.

I said, "A hot dog?"

"I'm a little tired of hot dogs," the raven said. "All beef, turkey, chicken—they all pretty much taste the same. What say we go to Chloe's for scrambled eggs with lox, bagel and cream cheese, and a side of bacon?"

"I've got my dogs with me," I said.

"Finnegan and Fergus can wait outside," the raven said. "You can bring them a snack after we eat."

So we went down to Chloe's on Church Street. The dogs and I walked; the bird flew ahead to reserve a table.

Over breakfast I asked the raven, who stood over his plate on the table, what he thought about the famous poem, The Raven.

"It's bullshit," the bird said. "In the first place the guy who wrote it was a dumb crow who didn't know squat about ravens. Like all we can say is one word. Even that he got wrong. What my ancestor actually said was, 'Never at the Moore's,' or 'Never Moore's.' Moore's was a lousy downtown restaurant. And dumb questions like, 'Is there balm in Gilead?' How should my ancestor know anything about Gilead's, which was an old diner in another city?"

"You ravens are associated with death," I said. "What do you think about this?"

"A pure canard. Prejudice, profiling. Mr. Edgar Allen Crow was an obsessed old bird."

Glad that the meaning of the poem had been clarified for me, I asked how the eggs were.

"Very good, thank you," said the raven. Then he called to the waitress. "Miss, another bagel, please. And I'd like my latte now, and a side of bacon to go." Then he turned to me and said, "Tomorrow let's try the waffles with Canadian bacon."

## JUST BUSINESS

Edgar was coming back several times each morning for more and more hot dog. And he didn't want just bites, but would turn his head so that he could grab the hot dog I held out to him in the middle, and so fly off with the whole thing. Finally I said, "What's going on here? I thought you were sick of hot dogs."

"They're not for me," the raven said, resting his sixth hot dog at his feet.

"Then who's eating them?" I was sort of thinking Edgar might have a young ones in the nest.

"I'll meet you down at Chloe's and tell you all about it," he said, and flew off with number six.

Edgar was already standing on his favorite table, finishing a plate of steak and eggs, with home fries, when I got to the restaurant.

"I'm in business," the bird said. "Capitalism. Private enterprise. You should be proud to be my partner."

"Business?"

"Yeah. I'm selling hot dogs at the ballpark. I get Solie Shuman's stale buns, and"—he looked around to see where Chloe was, then lowered his voice—"I take a little sour kraut and mustard and ketchup from the 'Help Yourself' table over there."

This I had to see, especially since I was a silent partner in the business.

That afternoon I went to the ballpark. On the roof above the reserved seats, several crows, a few ravens, some gulls and assorted other winged creatures, were perched along the edge of the overhang where they had a bird's eye view of the field. Walking behind them was Edgar, wearing a white cap and a white apron, and carrying a tray around his neck. His croak was unmistakable.

"Hot dogs here! Get you ball park specials here! I got 'em! Who wants em' now!"

When one of the crows flew down to the stands to pick up a stray piece of hamburger, I got a close look at one of Edgar's hot dogs. It was only about two inches long.

The next morning Edgar was at Billy Goat Hill bright and early to mooch hot dogs off his supplier—me. When I held out an empty hand, he looked up at me and opened his beak, but for once he said nothing.

"If I'm your partner," I said, "where's my share of the profits?"

Finally the black bird said, "Okay, give me the merchandise, I mean the hot dogs, and meet me down at Chloe's in a few minutes. I'll buy. How's that?"

While Edgar carefully watched, I looked over the menu and then ordered Eggs Benedict, a café latte, and fruit pie for dessert.

"Some people," Edgar said under his breath but loud enough for me to hear. "The guy must think I'm a millionaire."

"Aren't you eating today?" I said.

"With a partner like you," said the raven. "Nevermore."

Sorry, so far the story ends here. But hopefully my bird friend will be back with more adventures, either in the business world or elsewhere.