

## IN MY OPINION

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# Those dirty birds

We think that by the year 2000 human beings ought to be able to solve every problem there is. The problems over which we have no control are usually caused by Mother Nature. Engineers across the world have tried to contain floods, only to make them more deadly. We've lessened the lives lost with earlier predictions of tornadoes and hurricanes, but the devastation is just as bad. Other countries have been inundated with terrible earthquakes and flash floods, for which there doesn't seem to be any warning. Avalanches continue to take their toll in the mountainous countries of the world.

But here in Galesburg? At the heart of Knox County government? We have THE BIRDS. Every day workers and patrons of the Knox County Courthouse slip and slide their way up the sidewalks leading to the majestic, historic landmark that is the courthouse. One would think that because it's wintertime, we should expect to slip on a white substance called snow. Unfortunately, this white coating underfoot is not ice or snow, but a year-round substance called, well, there is no nice way to say it - bird poop. I shall refer to it only as "BP."

Now these birds which aren't even the annoying starlings who have been known to terrorize neighborhoods for years. They are great, big, black crows, and when they P—P, well, you can just imagine. The sheriff and his posse and city officials have tried all sorts of methods to get rid of birds in Galesburg - guns, bird bombs, stink bombs, but with no good results.

Frankly, I don't think this is a problem that can be solved. Even when the birds left the courthouse area for awhile, they went over to Moon Towers and Mary Ellen West Towers and just made those people mad at the sheriff, so Lord knows what they did to get the big birds back to the courthouse.

For several reasons, I feel I'm kind of an expert on this subject. In the neighborhood

where I grew up in Kewanee, starlings arrived about 4:30 every summer night and made an awful mess. In those days, it was normal to see neighbors making a racket by dragging their snow shovels up and down the sidewalk in the middle of summer to get rid of the birds. Others came outside to bang on pans with spoons. Occasionally, my father would take his shotgun and blast into the trees in our back yard.

It was quite festive and it certainly got the birds excited. Usually so excited the BP tripled in quantity and the birds, after rustling around awhile, usually settled right back where they were. People taking a walk at that time of day usually carried umbrellas. Every summer morning the lady across the street, because the birds seemed to like her side of the street better, washed her awnings, porch and sidewalk with hot soap and water so all would look well until the late afternoon onslaught.

One memorable summer the birds were particularly active, apparently all over Kewanee, so the local radio station decided to help solve the problem. At 6 pm one summer evening, residents were instructed to put their radios on the porch or as close

to the door as possible and turn them up to full volume. At the stroke of six, the radio station would play the sound of a wounded starling, which was supposed to scare the birds away.

I can't remember when the kids in my neighborhood laughed so hard. What an awful noise filled the air, and yes, the birds were very upset, and flew around and squawked in fear. They also had the same reaction we humans have everyone once in awhile when we have a sudden fear - we wet our pants. And so did the birds - except, of course, no pants. It was like Christmas in July.

But BP can be very symbolic. My senior year at Knox I was working feverishly on term papers and exams. Exhausted, I sat with friends on steps outside on the campus, my neat pile of term paper reference cards on top of books next to me. As we visited, a bird that must have been an eagle plopped an enormous deposit on top of my reference cards, white and purple and black trickling down the sides. Shocked, I looked at the mess and said, "Well, that just about sums up that paper," and we laughed until we cried.

Some things we just can't control.