

The Magic of Emily Oaks

Our family moved to Skokie in 1992. From the next 18 years, my wife Linda and I brought our children, Ben and Carolyn, to campfires and chili fests. We loved the pancake breakfasts and Earth Day celebrations, and we made a family portrait in the woods. I would describe us as casual fans of the Emily Oaks savanna. We'd drop in, but typically only for short visit or a quick walk.

All that changed for me on April 12, 2010. It was on that morning that I spotted the beautiful Common Loon that was passing through during the Spring Migration. For the next ten days, whenever I had a free moment, I came back to Emily Oaks to watch and photograph the Loon. The story of that time accompanies the series of four photographs of the Loon on the wooden panel to the left.

During my many hours following and photographing the Loon, I found myself slowing down and adjusting to the pace and rhythms of this extraordinary place. That's when the real magic of Emily Oaks slowly revealed itself.

Moving very quietly, I came within a few feet of a Great Blue Heron. I learned to appreciate the poetic flight of the Caspian Tern, the protective parenting of the Canada Goose and the exquisite call of the Brown Thrasher. I witnessed the silent flight of the Great Horned Owl and the hunt of Cooper's Hawks.

I learned that an astonishing variety of exotic birds and other animals chose our pond and woods as a stopover on their migratory journeys.

I became acquainted with the wonderful, committed and very knowledgeable folks who work here, and I continue to learn from them. They are, quite simply, a gift.

I'm delighted to share the magic of the Emily Oaks Nature Center in my photographs, and I encourage you to find your own by staying a little longer and taking the time to slow down to the natural rhythms of this place, to deeply listen and look intently.

I guarantee that you won't be disappointed. May the Magic be with you.

- Bob Kusel



The Loon of Kessem Pond

The Loon had been wounded somewhere in its travels and was entangled in a fishing lure. The sight of this beautiful, innocent creature, injured while sharing its environment with humans, moved me deeply, and I felt compelled to document its story with my camera. During the next ten days, whenever I had a free moment, I returned to Emily Oaks to bear witness to its struggle for survival.

The Loon fought the lure again and again, and eventually shed it. It replenished its strength by eating fish from the pond and gradually increased the length of its flights over the gentle water.

I was blessed to be there on the beautiful Spring day when the Loon flew one last graceful circle over Kessem Pond. With powerful wings it climbed into the azure sky to rejoin the northerly migration, healed.

The Photographer

Bob and Linda Kusel moved to Skokie 19 years ago to raise their children, Ben and Carolyn. Bob spent six years on the East Prairie School Board and led the launch of the local educational foundation.

Bob is an award-winning photojournalist in addition to his work in the corporate/business, editorial and non-profit arenas. His work has been featured in *Time*, *Newsweek*, *New York Times*, *Forbes*, *Fortune*, *Sierra*, *Smithsonian* and *Encyclopedia Britannica*. Assignment work, in addition to the above, has included the American Cancer Society, Bloomingdales, Catholic Extension Society, Chicago Coalition for the Homeless, Jewish United Fund, Little Brothers—Friends of the Elderly, Lyric Opera of Chicago, Prada, *Sports Illustrated*, United Airlines, Nordstrom and U.S. Gypsum.

