

Outlasting the Alligators

The problem, the fisherman explained, was the gators kept taking his fish.

I like Florida. I like the laid-back culture. I like the weather and the amazing assortment of plants and animals. Most of all, I like visiting my parents, who are both in their 80s now and enjoying a month in Florida before returning to their “real” home in the Midwest.

Yesterday we went to a State Park known for its wide diversity of wildlife and, on the banks of a river teeming with an impressive variety of birds, there was a lone fisherman (from Indiana, he informed us) trying to get the fish he caught into a bucket on shore. The trouble was the alligators.

A lot of us draw inspiration from animals. We want to soar like an eagle or be as brave as a lion. I am thinking I have a lot to learn from the alligator.

There was an enormous alligator sunning on the opposite shore as we approached the fisherman. The alligator’s belly was large and he was wearing the customary alligator smile. In the water directly in front of the fisherman were two more alligators, with only their eyes and the ends of their snouts visible. They were waiting.

“That alligator on the other shore,” the fisherman explained, “he gave me all kinds of trouble this morning. He got two of my fish before I could get them in.”

After he had enough for breakfast, the first alligator crawled out into the sunshine to digest. The fisherman then caught three fish, but the sound of the fish flopping in the bucket had attracted two more alligators.

“Now, whenever I get one on the line, they get to it before I can pull it in!”

I looked at the two alligators watching him intently. It was a little unnerving. I heard the fish flopping in the bucket. They appeared to be at a stalemate. I realized there were all sorts of problems I had never even known it was possible to experience.

The fisherman didn't seem particularly alarmed, not even when an alligator leaped with incredible speed and made off with another of his fish. But he was fed up, he explained. His wife was off quilting and he wasn't due to pick her up for a while yet. Meanwhile, the alligators were eating all his fish.

"I don't know what I'm gonna do," he reported glumly.

Alligators have been around since the rest of their cousins, the dinosaurs were, 200 million years ago. Alligators (and all of their 23 related species) have outlasted the dinosaurs by 65 million years and are going strong. Humans haven't managed to cause a single type to go extinct yet. Alligators can live in the dark, survive on almost any diet, and go for up to a year without sustenance. They are fast learners and have and survived because they are constantly adapting to changing circumstances. Today, they seem to have decided to outsource their hunting, and have found a willing volunteer from Indiana do it for them.

And while I was sympathetic to the fisherman and his quilting wife who were going to be short a few fish for dinner that night, I had to admit I admired the alligators. I kept thinking about those intelligent eyes watching, just above the waterline, patiently waiting for the next opportunity, ready to deal with whatever happened next.

When we left, the fisherman was starting to pack up his gear. He didn't think he would outlast the alligators. I think he was probably right about that.

Till next time,

Carrie