

COMMENTARY

When Grandpa toys with parallel parking

BY LORI BORGMAN
Tribune News Service

When my husband was asked if he would help teach twin granddaughters how to parallel park, he immediately yelled, “Yes!” If there was a parallel parking competition, my husband could take first place - unless our son entered the competition, then he’d take first place. Our son lived in Chicago for 10 years and none of his apartment buildings had a parking garage. In such cases, you either learn to parallel park or leave the city. That’s why

all the suburbs keep mushrooming. The twins’ first parallel parking lesson involved a tiny yellow passenger car, an itty bitty red truck and a miniature Batmobile on the sidewalk in front of the house. The instructor maneuvered the little yellow car, demonstrating how to pull forward, align rear bumpers with the little red truck, put the car in reverse, turn sharp as you back up, then turn sharp in the opposite direction, and back up again, careful not to hit the Batmobile. The lesson went well until the little yellow car



Learning to parallel park is more than child’s play.

lost traction, toppled off the sidewalk and tumbled into the grass. I learned to parallel park in a maroon ‘69 Ford XL, a vehicle similar in size to an Army tank. The car didn’t have a backup camera, but it had an AM push-button radio, parking brake, ashtray, cigarette

lighter and windows you rolled down manually. It also had side view mirrors, but I was so short I could hardly see them. I was more shocked than anyone when I parallel parked without hopping the curb or hitting the car behind me and got my driver’s license on the first

try. It was an event just short of feeding the 5,000 with only two fish and five loaves. When the husband promoted the twins to parallel parking in a real vehicle that could seat humans and not just Lego people, everyone had their fingers crossed - for the

girls and for the vehicles. They were to parallel park their mother’s car behind their father’s car and in front of their grandparents’ car. More than \$130,000 in vehicles were at risk in the interest of parallel parking. As the student drivers, their instructor and on-lookers took their places, there appeared to be more lengthy instruction sessions happening in the car, each followed by a not-so-successful parking attempt. More instructions, more attempts. After considerable time, it looked like the girls were getting the hang of it although the sun was now down, and it was pitch dark and hard to see. The important thing to remember is that practice makes perfect. The second most important thing to remember is that when a parallel parking spot appears impossible, keep driving - eventually you’ll find a spot you can manage.



An eaglet flies over White Rock Lake on July 9 in Dallas. Urban biologist Chris Morris looks after the city’s bald eagles.

Urban biologist on a mission to protect bald eagles in Dallas

BY SOPHIE HANAWALT
The Dallas Morning News

Chris Morris stopped abruptly on the sidewalk approaching White Rock Lake, urging the park visitors alongside him to do the same. “If you stand out here for a couple minutes or so, you’ll hear them calling at different times,” Morris said. “A neat thing about bald eagles is that the sound we hear in movies and TV shows, that’s a red tail, whereas eagles ... here we go. Right there. We’ve got one.” The City of Dallas’ Urban Biologist was on a mission to find the family of five eagles who’ve chosen a peculiar place to settle down: the ninth-largest city in the country. He instinctively rattled off facts as he followed the eagles’ chirps. Eagles, he discovered in 2023, seem to prefer classical music to songs with a droning bass. Contrary to popular belief, female eagles are larger because they have “more of an investment in the next generation,” he said. Male eagles do most of the hunting. Though his work as a member of the Dallas Park and Recreation Department’s Conservation and Forestry Team takes him throughout the city’s roughly 400 parks, Morris

can often be found at White Rock, checking on the eagles and sharing a wealth of wildlife knowledge with anyone who wants to listen. **DALLAS’ FEATHERED RESIDENTS** For years now, a pair of eagles dubbed Nick and Nora by White Rock Lake-area residents has called the area home, returning even though storms destroyed their nests in 2022 and 2024. In March, the pair hatched three baby eaglets. “This is very unique because historically, when you have wildlife in cities, wildlife always loses,” Morris said. Nestled in the heart of a major urban area, the eagles chose a tree near White Rock Lake’s Stone Tables for this year’s nest. It’s an area marked by the steady drone of traffic, punctuated by sirens from emergency vehicles. And it’s 60 feet away from one of the busiest public restrooms at the entire lake. “This is probably the worst site of the lake they could have chosen,” Morris said. Due to the birds’ protected status under the Migratory Bird Treaty Act and the Bald and Golden Eagle Protection Act, the city has placed federally advised borders around the nest - 330 feet of protection surrounding the

nest plus another 330 once they begin to venture out of it. This has proved difficult for Morris and his boss, Conservation Manager Brett Johnson, in such a vibrant urban area. “When you close down a state park, no one comes onto the property. They’re like, all right. They don’t test you or try to get in places,” Morris said. At White Rock, “It’s kind of a logistical nightmare.” Morris and Johnson closed the playground, trail and road surrounding the nest at times this spring to help keep the young birds safe. The community of nature photographers and eagle enthusiasts who frequent the lake text Morris when they perceive the eaglets’ safety to be at risk, typing “Hey, someone’s running across the barriers!” and “The parents fed two of the eaglets, but not one of them.” But there isn’t much his team can do to legally enforce eagle protections, Morris said, as the responsibility of law enforcement falls on state and federal game wardens who do not have the capacity to frequently monitor the birds. Morris knew it would take more than what he joked was the entire supply of chain barricades at Dallas’ Home Depot and

Lowe’s stores to keep the birds safe. So, he decided to lean on his passion for education. **EDUCATION AS A MEANS OF CONSERVATION** As urban biologist, Morris works on all sorts of conservation efforts for the city, from vegetation removal and tree surveys to speaking at City Council meetings. “I love my job because I get to visit all 400 of our parks,” Morris said. “Sometimes it’s not so fun when you have ticks and mosquitoes and you’re hiking up in the middle of Rosemeade Park, though.” For the past few months, Morris has added a daily stop at White Rock to the chaos of his daily tasks. He said Johnson has also shifted his schedule to do the same. The eaglets have become a priority because they’re both federally protected and, as Morris puts it, “a jewel of the city.” Morris’ efforts to engage with residents, both at his weekly nature talks on Thursdays and through his own outreach to Facebook and NextDoor groups, grew from his understanding that wildlife education is the best way to keep the eaglets safe. “Education is a joy; it’s not a job to me,” Morris

said. After graduating from Texas A&M with a zoology degree in 2008, Morris never stopped learning. While working at the Houston, Fort Worth and Dallas zoos and later joining the city of Dallas to work on water conservation efforts and education projects, Morris has amassed an array of certifications to equip him with the knowledge necessary for an ever-evolving conservation landscape. In 2023, he became the urban biologist. The job requires near-constant research. “I literally have a library of like 50 books so I can go back and forth if I need to refresh myself on some bird calls or landscaping or tree species,” Morris said. He is often thinking ahead to the next talk he might be able to give. “When I’ve got free time at night, I just look at scientific documents about eagles and other raptors. That way, I can do another talk,” Morris said. “Then someone wants to learn about flowers, so I learn about flowers.” **MORRIS’ TRIPS TO THE LAKE** When the eaglets first began to venture out of the nest, Morris and Johnson made sure to be at White Rock seven days a week, their means of en-

suring the eagles’ boundaries were respected as they grew. Now, the eaglets require less monitoring. They have learned to fly and will soon move out of the nest entirely. Still, Morris is at the lake as much as he can be. This presence has not gone unnoticed. Chris Giblin, the creator of the 10,000-member Nick and Nora (WRL Bald Eagles) Fan Page Facebook group, said Morris and Johnson’s efforts are invaluable to the community that has rallied around the birds. “Every one of us, whether photographers or enthusiasts, we really do appreciate what the city is doing and what our urban biologists and conservationists are doing for Nick and Nora, just ensuring that they stay safe,” Giblin said. Visiting the lake recently, Morris wore a Dallas Parks and Recreation cap and shirt that made him easy to spot. Curious visitors trying to glimpse the eagles flocked to him seeking a nugget of knowledge about the birds. He spliced niche eagle facts into friendly conversations with onlookers while he scanned for loose branches and damage to the nest’s barricades. He uses the visits to help people understand why restrictions are in place. For example, Morris said he tells dog owners how the adult eagles sometimes dive-bomb people with large dogs off a leash. After scoping out the area surrounding the nest, he joined park visitors by the water, watching the eaglets dive for food with their parents. A crowd of photographers gathered to listen as he began to explain how eagles learn to hunt for food. “They are actually thieves for the first years of their life. They have to steal food from others before they can fully hunt,” Morris said. Morris is well-versed in the culture of the photographers at the lake, saying he admires how collaborative and tight-knit the community of eaglet fans has become. He recently had the chance to speak to World Cup tourists who said they heard there were eagles in Dallas and came to see them. To Morris’ delight, they did not point out that there are actually larger eagles in Australia. In late August or early September, the eaglets will be fully grown, and Morris will stop venturing out to White Rock as they fly south. Instead, he said he will get a quick rest before planning tree plantings throughout the fall. In November, he anticipates the adult eagles will come back, and with that, Morris will soon have a new nest to watch over.