



## Musing

June 2017 - "Swimming with the Loons"

Carole Rusch

One of my delights in life is an early morning swim, whether in a pool, a lake, a river or an ocean. However, my favorite place to swim is in the Eau Claire Lakes, especially in Mooney Bay of Lower Eau Claire as it empties over the Mooney Dam into the Eau Claire River which runs into the St. Croix on its way to the Mississippi, one great water system. As I swim early in the morning, I always expect it to be a solitary experience. Not! I have sometimes been accompanied by a muskrat who lives along our shoreline, a kingfisher who likes to sit on our pontoon boat, sometimes by a turtle or a beaver, but most recently by a loon.

On the morning of June 9<sup>th</sup>, I walked down the path past the boathouse and onto the dock, stepped into the water and swam my 100 strokes out into deeper water. I was paying no attention to what was happening around me until I looked around and found I was within three yards of a loon, who was looking at me inquisitively. What was I doing in his lake? When I attempted to swim to my right, he moved with me and blocked my way. He watched and made a low gurgling sound. He was not threatening nor did he rise up and flap his wings at me. He simply continued to swim with me back and forth, left to right, right to left, so close, until after 5 minutes, I swam back to the dock where my neighbor was watching in amazement. "Barbara," I said, "did you see that?" "Yes," she said. "The chicks and mama are over near our dock. He's guarding them. I've never seen anything like it before."

According to our neighbor, Ted Eastlund, the chicks had just hatched the day before and the parents would have to be very watchful for three weeks until the chicks are able to dive on their own. I never expected to have a loon as a swimming partner.