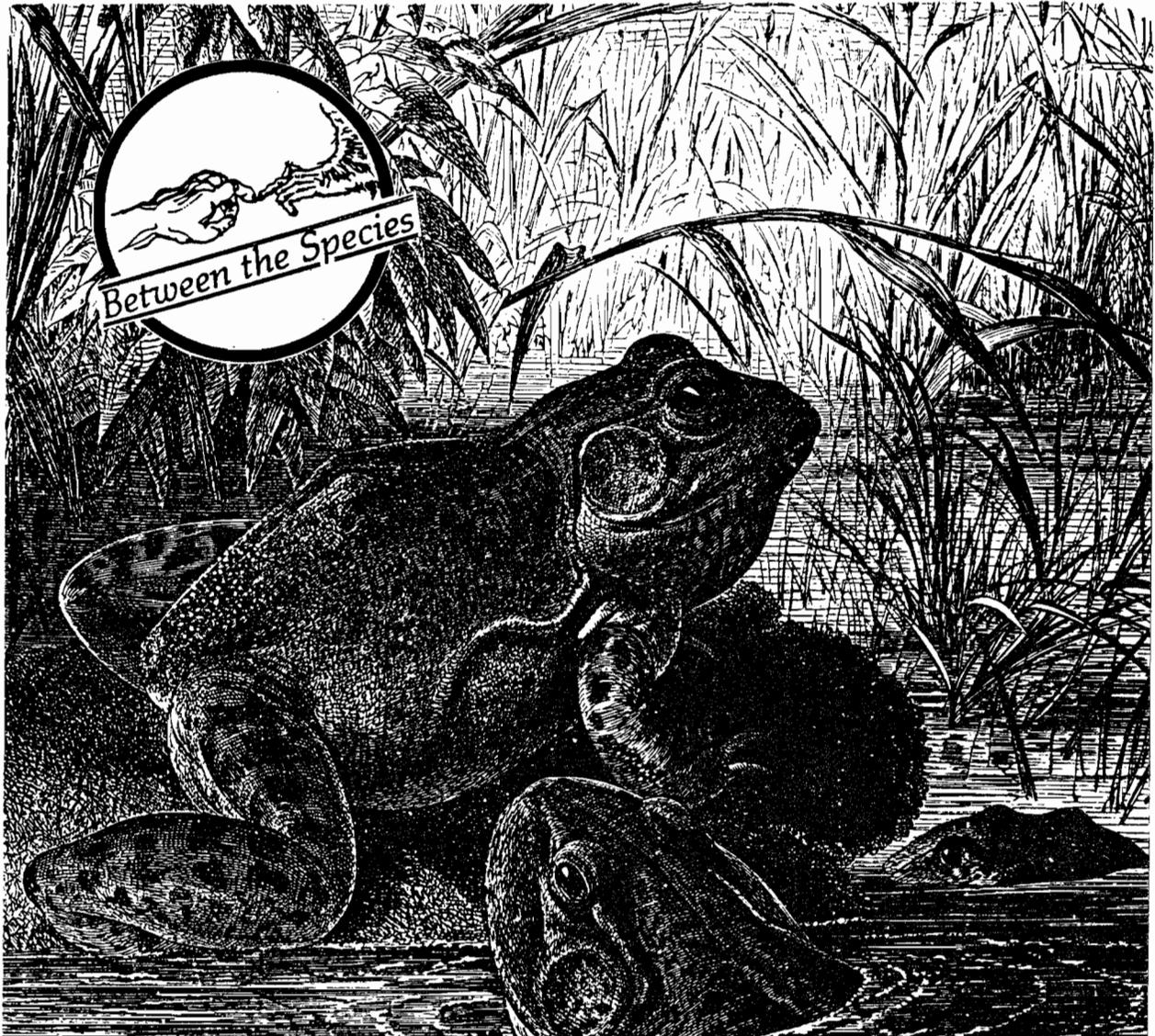




Between the Species



AUTOBIOGRAPHICAL NOTES

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My first encounter with the miraculous and the mystical was as a child. I had a playground full of miracles. It included an area called the "jungle," a wasteland full of



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wild things. But for World War II, it would have been obliterated by the suburban housing development where I was raised for the first ten years of my life. And there were six ponds scattered close by on land where there were fields of corn, turnips, pastures for cattle, a meandering public footpath lined with brambles, black and purple with shining berries in the fall; and a children's playing field for summer cricket and winter soccer.

Like the child in Walt Whitman's poem who went out into the world and became all that he perceived, I entered the mystical world of nature that my miraculous playground embraced, and became a part of everything. The microcosm of the pond is truly awesome in its beauty, subtlety, order and complexity: a universe in miniature and a relatively alien world to us terrestrial talking bipeds. This I recognized and appreciated as a child. To play with a pond--and by that I mean to examine at close hand, to "mind" everything that I perceived in it, on it, and around it--was to experience the miraculous. And each pond was different.

One was the sanctum of the Great Crested Newt; and in another pond lived the water spider who built an underwater net and secured a large bubble of air in it within which her offspring developed and hatched.

My first involvement with ponds was before my earliest memories. I was told that I nearly drowned when, under the inattentive eye of a young babysitter, I decided to walk into one of the ponds to float and dabble with some mallard ducks.

But it was no near-death experience that made me cherish and revere the miraculous. It was the life that I discovered in my playground where I invariably played alone, since none of my peers had much interest in the ponds except in occasionally killing whatever they might catch therein with nets and worms on bent pins.

Today, one of my frequent childhood playmates of the ponds, the Great Crested Newt, is now so rare that there is a four thousand dollar fine and possible imprisonment for any person who takes or kills one of them. And the few ponds that remain (all those along with my playground are long gone) that harbor these newts are legally protected from obliteration and pollution. There is so

little of all this, and my childhood, left.

At heart I have always been a naturalist, if not a mystic, and a conservationist, if not an ecologist. The ponds taught me the laws of the universe--that there is a seamless web of life wherein the forces of creation and destruction are in balance, so that everything is contained in a state of harmony, health, and beauty.

My other playmates were furry, four-legged friends people called dogs and horses. Most of my canine companions were stray and roaming dogs. They would explore the jungle, and the fields and hedgerows with me (most avoided the ponds). By being with and "minding" them, I came to see the world a little through their eyes, learning to look in places they investigated (if not showed me) to discover lizards, toads, beetles, caterpillars, and even hedgehogs, birds' nests, eggs, and the fascinating remains of dead creatures.

This childhood activity of "minding" everything that I observed came back to me many years later when I was in India studying the dhole or Asiatic wild dog in the jungles of S.E. India. I had adopted a stray pariah village dog, and it was not long before she was showing me the jungle through her eyes. We actually explored and hunted together, but without any intention or need to kill anything. For some reason, she seemed to leave that decision to me, even though she was the lead tracker.

These childhood and other lessons, arising from a combination of circumstance and inclination, certainly influenced my subsequent development. By the age of eight, I decided to become an animal doctor. Some of my strays had been sick with malnutrition, lice, distemper, worms, and white bread bleach (ageine) hysteria. Fifteen years later, I graduated from the Royal Veterinary College, London.

On my ninth Christmas, my parents gave me a small microscope in a cedarwood case (which I still have in my possession). This was like a new key into the mystical and miraculous realm of the invisible: creatures too small to the naked eye were revealed in a drop of pond water on a glass slide beneath the lenses of the microscope. I was once more captured by the wonder and diversity of

creation and found confirmation more of what I found than felt, in books of natural history and science.

When I was twelve years old, my parents moved to a rural town in the sheep-covered moor-topped dales of Derbyshire. It was there that my knowledge and love of aquatic life led me to the brooks and streams of the gritstone moors and limestone hillsides, and across the moors in winter blizzards and into the eternal night of underground caves.

I loved this land so much that I almost became a sheep veterinarian. But instead, partly because it was not economical for sheep farmers to treat their sheep individually and give them the best possible veterinary attention, I developed an interest in clinical neurology and behavior. A little miniature dachshund, crippled with hydrocephalus, triggered this direction of my attention. She was developmentally retarded and neurologically impaired and was my first (terminal) patient given to me during my internship as House Surgeon at the Cambridge University School of Veterinary Medicine. From this junction, I was awarded a post-doctoral fellowship at the Jackson Laboratory, Bar Harbor, Maine, in 1962. I studied brain and behavior development in the dog, moving to the Thudichum Psychiatric Research Laboratory at Galesburg State Research Hospital in Illinois in 1963 to continue this research. By 1967 I completed my dissertation for an external Ph.D. in the faculty of medicine, University of London and joined the faculty of Washington University, St. Louis. There I taught animal behavior, developmental neurobiology, and abnormal behavior, and researched the behavior and development of wolves, coyotes, jackals, red and gray foxes, and other canids.

This research was aimed at elucidating how domestication had affected the dog. As T. S. Eliot observed, "The end is where we start from . . . And the end of all our exploring will be to arrive where we started and know the place for the first time."

My deep emotional involvement with the wolves and other captive, wild canid friends whom I raised, loved, played with, and observed, led me naturally toward the next turning point. This path led away from academia. With a D.Sc. in ethology/animal behavior freshly awarded by London University for

ten years' productive research, I finally graduated into the "real" world, leaving the security of a tenured post and the satisfaction of being recognized as an "outstanding" teacher, an activity I enjoyed far more than the faculty accolade I had no mind to earn.

The "real" world that I chose was the advocacy world of animal welfare, rights, and conservation. I joined The Humane Society of the United States, Washington, D.C., in 1976, working primarily on the welfare problems of companion, farm, and laboratory animals.

I have been fortunate in having some of my concerns and views published in various books written for children as well as for adults. And for over a decade, I have written a regular column in McCall's magazine and built the syndicated newspaper column, "Ask Your Animal Doctor." Now in some 200 newspapers, I am constantly informed, through readers' letters about the problems, concerns, and experiences that they have with their animal companions, which is the best continuing education I could ask for. And I have the opportunity, albeit somewhat limited, to speak for the animals through these channels.

But I always wish that I could do more. I feel and see the miraculous, numinous world of my childhood fast disappearing, as whole ecosystems and species plunge into the invisibility of extinction. And I am fully aware of how human insensitivity and ignorance contribute to the suffering of animals under our dominion and to the holocaust of the animal kingdom, as well as to the material and spiritual poverty of humanity. I have helped initiate scientific, philosophic, legislative, litigative, and educational solutions to these concerns. But these alone are not enough. Human insensitivity, and the desperate poverty of the many, coupled with the insatiable greed of the rich, are turning the natural world into a desecralized and polluted industrial wasteland.

As a child, I was deeply disturbed by the grime and squalid ugliness of the industrial north of England, with its coal mining towns, smoldering slag-heaps and gloomy cotton and steel mills, the "satanic mills" of William Blake. And it was not until my parents' Golden wedding anniversary, when I was 48 years old, that I was similarly disturbed by the sight of sheep and their spring lambs that covered the Derbyshire hillsides, a

sight that once filled me with a sense of renewal. This bucolic pastoral scene was unnatural, illusory; it was another industrialized landscape almost devoid of wildlife, displaced by the sheep and cattle being raised for human consumption. I wonder now, with this change in feeling and perception, what my fate would have been had I decided to become a country veterinarian specializing in sheep diseases and husbandry.

And I wonder, without the inspiration and encouragement of parents and teachers and without the opportunity to connect with Nature in childhood, how can there be any respect for wild things in the adult population?

The wanton destruction of Nature, the extermination of wildlife, and the cruel exploitation of animals in laboratories and factory farms are, I believe, symptoms of our collective emotional and spiritual disconnectedness from the natural world. It is through emotional (empathetic) connectedness that our ethical and spiritual sensibilities of respect and love toward the rest of creation arise spontaneously. And it is with these thoughts in mind that I have become associated with the recently established International Network for Religion and Animals (P. O. Box 33061, Washington, D.C. 20033-0061, U.S.A.). Organized religion is a "sleeping giant" ready to be awakened to help guide humanity toward world peace and to restore the earth. As Albert Schweitzer observed, without a reverence for all life, we will never enjoy world peace.

The kind of religion that I envision is not one based upon dogma or intellectual theology/philosophy, but upon feeling, empathy for Nature and all living and non-living things. The words of an Australian Aborigine, Bill Neidjie, express this sentiment with great clarity and intensity:

You can look, but feeling . . . that make you. . . Earth [is], like your father or brother or mother, because you born from earth . . . if you feel sore . . . headache, sore body, that mean somebody killing tree or grass. You feel because your body [is] in that tree or earth. Nobody can tell you, you got to feel it yourself.

It is this kind of empathetic sensitivity

that, thanks to ponds, pets, and parents, I was fortunate to experience as a child. Putting one's heart-mind into a pond or into an animal is in many ways analogous to the Aborigine's state of "dreamtime," which, to paraphrase Sioux medicine man Black Elk, is the way to living in harmony with the power of the world as it lives and moves and does its work. This power, the Dreaming One who is dreaming us, we call God or divinity. And it is not from belief, but from direct empathetic, feeling-full experience that we live in harmony and peace.

One of my greatest pleasures of recent years has been learning to play the Japanese Shakuhachi and Andean Kena flutes. One of my best teachers and accompanists was "Tiny," a captive-born wolf whom I raised myself and who died at the age of 16 in 1986. There is now a mutt in my life from New York's East Side, where he was cruelly abused and abandoned. On occasion, he sings like a little wolf when I play with him and the spirit of the occasion is right. The experience of making music with an animal is something that I wish everyone could enjoy, although I sometimes wonder if it is right to touch the soul of another so deeply.

More than half my life is now over. In retrospect, I see that I am ending my life where I began, with the same feelings toward creation that I had as a child. These feelings have never changed, but my actions have. I am becoming a little wiser, especially from my own mistakes, and in the process discovering the meaning of humility. As St. Francis said, "A man knows as much as he has suffered." And I am grateful for having been loved and having had so much to love in this lifetime.

