



Volume 11 Number 91

March 2017

A PARROT TALE

by Kay Silberfeld

Once upon a time here at Pennswood Village, there lived a resident named Kitty who owned a parrot. Although the parrot lived in a cage, she often let him out so he could fly around the apartment.

One fine day, the parrot was out of his cage and was perched above a door when, Kitty, unwittingly, closed the door on his foot.

For several weeks after this incident, every time she looked at the parrot, he would, pathetically, hold up his injured foot and fix his unblinking eyes accusingly on her. He was a sorry sight and Kitty felt appropriately guilty.

And then, one day, she realized that something was different: the parrot was still giving her the indignant stare, but now he was, mistakenly, holding up the unhurt foot!

THE SANIBEL PARROT

by Leslie Wendel

Some years ago, my husband and I spent a week visiting friends in their condo on Sanibel Island, FL. One day, our hostess, Joanne, and I went off to the local supermarket, Jerry's Foods.

While Joanne was in the store, I lingered outside to admire a lush garden, full of palm trees, around the entrance to the store. In the garden was an enormous cage, about 10 feet high, with a large parrot inside. Two little kids, maybe seven and eight years old, were standing in front of the cage.

"What does the kitty say?" one of them asked the parrot.

"Hello," said the parrot.

"What does the kitty say?" the other youngster repeated.

"Hello," the parrot said again.

The two kids were enjoying the game and went on and on, taking turns questioning the parrot—over and over and over again.

“What does the kitty say?” they kept asking.

And every time, the parrot cocked its head at them and said “Hello.”

Then, their mother came out of the store with a cart full of groceries, and the two kids followed her out to the parking lot.

The parrot stared at their departing backs and, with beautiful enunciation, said, “Meow.”

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| <p>“We’ll be friends forever, won’t we Pooh?” asked Piglet. “Even longer,” Pooh answered. A.A. Milne</p> |
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TO KARACHI AND BACK

by Yoma Ullman

Lyons Corner House was the place to eat in London in 1948. I was blissful there, eating sausages and mashed potatoes with gravy. They were a wonderful change from boarding school food.

I was only nearly 12, so my aunt was with me to see me off on a plane to Karachi the next day. I would spend the summer vacation there with my parents.

The flight to Pakistan on an Avro York plane would take a very long time. I had refused to go on a plane with chaperoned school children. Now I was on a regular flight, supposedly watched over by an older girl and her friend. They had zero interest in me: I was on my own.

This became instantly clear when we landed at Basra in Iraq and were told that the navigator had tonsillitis and could fly no further. We had to wait for another to be flown in. That meant a night in Basra. We were billeted in a Royal Air Force (RAF) camp with the suggestion that we form pairs and share rooms. The two girls went off together. I was left with the young officer charged with allocating rooms. He clearly didn’t like to leave me in a room by myself, but there was no alternative, so, having told me to keep the plug in the bathtub drain to deter snakes, he left.

That evening, we were invited to join the men (no women in sight) at a movie. We sat on chairs set up in the desert. The appearance of three girls, barely nubile though we were, produced whistles and catcalls. The movie was violent and scary, and I soon left and went to bed. First, I made sure the plug was very, very firmly in the bathtub drain.

Next morning, with no navigator in sight, the kindly RAF sent us for a ride in a motorboat on the Shatt-el-Arab waterway. When my turn came,

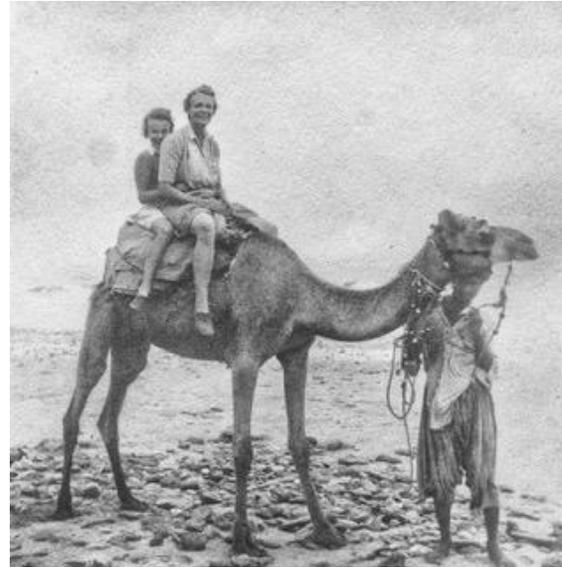
they entrusted me with the wheel—for a very short time indeed. I had no idea how to steer a boat.

Eventually, a healthy navigator arrived, and we went on to Karachi where my mother met me. I was devastated that she didn't have my father with her, but he was in bed with dengue fever. I was allowed to greet him from a distance.

While he recovered, my mother took me to the club (a fixture in British expat life) to swim and to take ballet lessons. Partition between India and Pakistan was recent, and the English were not loved. Dissidents often put sand in the fuel tanks of expats' cars. Kidnapping was common. So one morning, when I went for an early walk, leaving a note they didn't see, my parents were both angry and relieved when I got back in time for breakfast.

At the weekends when my father recovered, we went out with friends to a primitive concrete hut on a beach reached by small hired boats. There we washed the dishes in the sand for lack of fresh water. We swam in the sea, which gave us itchy mica scales on our legs. My mother and I briefly rode a passing camel, something I have never wished to do again.

The vacation ended, and I had to go back to England and boarding school. I was to travel on a Sunderland flying



boat that would take off from Karachi harbor in the middle of the night. I was put to bed as usual and then woken, fed a banana, and taken in the car to the port. I was very confused when I got on the plane, again flying alone, but a steward asked if I wanted to go to sleep. I said yes and was put all by myself in a tiny cabin with a bed. I went to sleep, but not until I had been scared by flames coming out of one of the plane's engines just outside my porthole as we took off. My parents, meanwhile, were convinced that the plane was full of Arabian sheiks and they would never see me again.

Next morning, we landed on the Nile in Cairo. I was fully awake and in my seat looking down at the river. The water looked far too thick, brown and rough to land on. But the Nile received us safely, sending up tremendous sprays of water all over the portholes as we touched down.

This time I was billeted in Shepherd's Hotel, an icon in the history of the British Empire. In the evening, I sat on the terrace in front of the hotel with a somewhat older boy, who was also a passenger. I had no idea what the men with camels who came up and tried to get me to go with them were talking about. But the boy did. He fended them off, and eventually I went to bed. That night, for security I was supposed to share a room with an airhostess. Lying there, waiting for her to join me, I heard the door from the balcony rattle repeatedly. Too terrified to move, I waited for whoever it was to get in, but they failed. The hostess arrived later, waking me up just enough to realize how furious she was at having to share a room with this boring child.

Next morning as I sat on the plane, by now friends with the helpful boy, a tall man with a disgusted expression told me I was wanted in first class. The Premier of Queensland in Australia wanted to talk to me. I knew that the man felt his errand was utterly beneath his dignity. The Premier turned out to be a fatherly type who was aware of my previous evening's adventures, good and bad. He told me he was going to keep an eye on me for the rest of the trip, and I was not to worry any more. I was grateful as I went back to my seat but wondered what this would mean.

I found out that evening. We had landed in the harbor of Port Augusta, Sicily, on the bluest and clearest of water. After dinner, the Premier sent his supercilious aide for me, and the three of us drove through Port Augusta in a hired horse-drawn carriage. We stopped at a jewelry shop because the Premier wanted to get something for his wife. But he also very kindly bought me a tiny fish, about an inch long, made of golden filigree work. At school, that fish went on a thread around my neck and to every exam I took for years.

Another day on the plane followed. The helpful boy and I were called up to the cockpit and given a chance to fly the plane. If they had taken the wheel away from me fast in Basra, that was nothing compared to the speed with which they took the joystick from my hands. I had aimed at a cloud I thought was level with us, only to put the plane into a dive as the cloud went by beneath us.

Back in our seats we were bored, very bored. We passed the time with a bread fight that got so wild that the stewards came and stopped us. The Sunderland finally landed on Southampton Water in the south of England. The Premier's eye was upon me until my godmother arrived to meet me. She fulfilled her duty: she put me back into my school uniform and delivered me to the school train in time for the fall term.

Some people talk to animals. Not many listen though. That's the problem.

Winnie the Pooh, A.A. Milne

GIRAFFES by Leslie Wendel

Do giraffes sleep standing up? Perhaps a curious question, but, for some strange reason, one that popped into my head when I was brushing my teeth one morning.

I forgot about it and went on with my day. Then, the next day and, again, a couple of days later, the giraffe question kept cropping up. Do giraffes stand up or lie down to sleep? What do they do with those long necks and long legs if they lie down? And, wouldn't it be hard for them to get back up?

So, I googled it—and learned that giraffes rarely sleep. Indeed, they have the shortest sleep requirement of any mammal. In their native habitat, they are prey, and they're easy to spot since they are so tall. Their lives depend on being awake and constantly alert to danger.

A giraffe in the wild generally sleeps only about half-an-hour per day, in short spurts of four or five minutes, according to *The National Geographic*. In a zoo, safe from predators, they may sleep as much as four hours a day.

And yes, they usually do sleep standing up. That's because it *is* hard to get back up when you're 18 feet tall. (Giraffe babies are six feet tall when they're born.)

But sometimes they do sleep lying down. Pretzel, anyone?



“What day is it?” asked Pooh.
“It’s today,” squeaked Piglet.
“My favorite day,” said Pooh.
A.A. Milne

CODY

by **Marjorie Burns**

Self-assured in his thick, pure-white coat,
The big dog trots along purposefully,
With Lisa a leash-length behind.
He knows where he's leading her.
If you call out, "Hi, Cody! How are you feeling today?"
He will pause and regard you politely
For a few seconds.
Perhaps you have something important to tell him.
No?
Well, then, excuse me, but I have important business to attend to.
And again he sets out,
Following some trail that we can't see
Toward some goal that we haven't thought of yet.

"Well," said Pooh, "what I like best," and then he had to stop and think. Because although Eating Honey was a very good thing to do, there was a moment just before you began to eat it which was better than when you were, but he didn't know what it was called.

Winnie the Pooh, A.A. Milne

A ZOO STORY

by **Kay Silberfeld**

There was a time when I thought that if I could do my life over, I would be an animal keeper in a zoo.

Consequently, in 1987, when I was between jobs and living in Washington, DC, I went to the National Zoo and asked for a volunteer job working directly with animals.

The keepers in the Invertebrate House needed someone to help with the feedings and since invertebrates, animals without backbones, are not immediately appealing, they had difficulty getting volunteers. I signed up for two mornings a week.

My work day began with cutting up frozen fish into small pieces. Some of these pieces would be speared on the pointed end of a three-foot-long stick; others would be just scattered around on the bottoms of the animals' tanks.

And then came the actual feeding.

One of the most beautiful displays was a large, water-filled tank containing sea anemones. They were all different shapes and colors and sat on rocks at the bottom of their tank. To feed them, I climbed up a ladder behind the scene, reached over the edge of the tank and slowly moved the stick with a piece of fish on it, down through the water, aiming for the tentacles on the top of each anemone. Smelling the fish, the targeted animal would open out its tentacles to receive the food in its mouth.

I had to keep track of which anemone I had already fed, and there were a lot

of them in the tank. The even more serious problem was keeping the slimy piece of fish from dropping off the stick before I reached the intended mouth. Since the water in the tanks had to be kept at a specific acidity, these loose, deteriorating pieces of fish would change its chemistry. When I allowed too many pieces to fall into the water, the keepers had to empty, clean out and refill the tank.

It wasn't long before the anemone display was eliminated from my feeding schedule.

Then there was the tank of maybe five or six cuttlefish. Since they were in almost continuous motion and, to my untrained eye, all looked alike, once again, I was not sure which ones I'd already fed. Unlike the quiet anemones, the cuttlefish had quick tempers, and my clumsy feeding could rapidly result in a cuttlefish fight. This was a terrifying spectacle which involved their releasing a lot of very black ink, contaminating the tank and necessitating a water change.

It was a relief when the cuttlefish were also taken off my "to feed" list!

Fortunately for the keepers and for me, there were tanks of animals who were less problematic to feed, such as the hermit crabs. They were in a small tank, no climbing needed, and they were non-swimmers and were comparatively easy to keep track of. And, I thought they were cute!

Even easier were the displays of very small creatures (I've forgotten who they were) whose food I could just leave in piles scattered around the bottoms of their tanks.

Probably the most prized resident of the Invertebrate House was a large octopus. He had learned to feed himself by unscrewing the lid of a jar to reach the food inside. He was not on my list!

That the keepers kept me on shows how desperate they were for help. Amazingly, the staff continued to be friendly to me, inviting me along on their periodic evenings out together. Their favorite restaurant was a crab house where they happily ate the species of creature they spent their working hours caring for! (I usually ate crab cakes because they didn't look like the real animal.)

I don't remember how many months I worked in the Invertebrate House, perhaps just through one long winter. I continued to enjoy being at the Zoo, but decided to leave to work with horses and children, both creatures with backbones!

It's more fun to talk with someone who doesn't use long, difficult words but rather short, easy words like "What about lunch?"

Winnie the Pooh, A.A. Milne

BLUEBIRDS

by John C. Wood

Stroked by a soft breeze,
At ease on a slatted park bench,
Inscribed to some departed loved one,
You have come to see the bluebirds,
Secure in their public housing,
Supplied at no public expense,
Prefabs, uniform and neat.
A field sparrow, of no particular
distinction,
Flits about, alights and darts in fits
and starts,
Flipping fallen leaves at random
In search of food fragments,
Ants, aphids, anything that serves
to fuel
The furnace required for restless
flight.
A bluebird jets from his front port,
Soon joined by more modest mate,
And does not disappoint.
Yet the mundane sparrow still
distracts
And you can't help hoping
That a fat grub is under the next
leaf.

Book Review

IN A SMALL WORLD, LIVES SHARED

by Jane Perkinson

A young woman lies on her bed in an unfamiliar room, alone and too ill even to sit up. Somewhere in the room she hears a purposeful clicking,

and she is curious to know what it means.

So begins *The Sound of a Wild Snail Eating*, an astonishing account by its author, Elisabeth Tova Bailey, about a year in her life and the transforming impact on her of the tiny animal that shared that life for a time.

Bailey was the victim of an illness of mysterious origin, which devastated her neurological system and left her energy depleted. She was living in a temporary apartment close to nursing care but distant from her own home. "All life," she writes of that time, "was out of reach."

But the clicking sound, it turned out, was being made by a snail, no bigger than an acorn, chewing on a discarded paper envelope on Bailey's nightstand. The tiny newcomer was a gift from a friend who had found it and placed it in a pot of violets she'd dug up. By day, it slept under a leaf in the pot; but each night, as Bailey watched, it would peer over the edge, its tentacles waving with apparent interest, and climb down to her nightstand to explore more of its surroundings.

It occurred to Bailey that the snail, like her, had been cut off from home and placed in an altered landscape. She wondered: What did it feel when it was picked up and put in a flower pot, its life interrupted? For that matter, what *was* its ordinary life? Her

own active days—gardening, exploring, hiking, sailing, reading, friends and family—had been taken from her abruptly. Far from her friends, her body feeling useless but her mind running in a search for elusive answers, she gradually began concentrating all her attention and energy on the snail and its place here with her.

Over the following year, hour by hour and day by painful day, cut off increasingly from friends and worn out by their human energy, Bailey was “pulled . . . further by the snail’s curiosity and grace into its peaceful and solitary world.” She noted its food preferences (wilted leaves and flower petals, which she was able to supply from the bouquets visitors brought her) and its contentment with a new terrarium but its dislike for strange soil. To her delight, a brood of tiny pearl-like eggs appeared in the terrarium, and in time there emerged over 100 snail children.

But she never forgot its wild origins, and she knew she was not meant to keep it forever. So, when her health had improved slightly, she escorted it back to its own landscape in the wild, together with most of its offspring (she kept one with her for a time, then bequeathed it to a caregiver).

Though her life was beginning to return closer to normal, Bailey’s mysterious illness would plague her for nearly two decades. During this

time, she would explore in detail the rich literature on snails—including Haiku poets, children’s picture books, and early studies by Oliver Goldsmith and Charles Darwin, as well as current scientific research.

She was to learn about a snail’s 2,640 tiny teeth, arranged in rows of needle-like sharpness; its brain, containing from 5,000 to 100,000 giant neurons; the eyes on the tips of its hollow tentacles; and the single foot which let it glide forward on its own film of mucus. She learned that snails can react to danger with what humans would identify as real fear; and, apparently, that there is from early-evolutionary times a common ancestry with the rest of us, half a billion years old.

This book is evidence that her comradeship with the snail had pulled her to reach inward to an understanding of her own fragility and strength, but also a courage and curiosity that drew her outward as well. The poignant story of *The Sound of a Wild Snail Eating* makes for an overwhelmingly enjoyable read and—reader be warned!—an irresistible urge to pass it on to friends.

Organization is what you do before you do something so that when you do it, it’s not all mixed up.

Winnie the Pooh, A.A. Milne

THE FOX

by Anne Baber

We're driving down a narrow road
that runs the length of the island
hoping to feast our eyes on the ocean
when we come upon the sign:
Do Not Feed The Fox!

Only one? We're amused, annoyed:
We'd have no intention of feeding
him.

As if on cue, The Heralded Fox
struts onto the road before us.
We stop. Eye each other warily.

What does The Fox like to eat?
An apple core, a wriggling mouse?
Would we feed him, if we could?
Just standing there, he has the
swagger
of Cap'n Jack Sparrow or Puss'n
Boots.

Shouldn't he be wearing a plumed
hat?
Does he do that? Make us one of his
own,
see us as a creature with a silver
carapace
and buggy, sunglassed beetle eyes,
peering out on either side?

We stare at him, relish his otherness—
one hungry Fox, two satiated tourists.

CALLING DEVOTEES OF THE WORD

You're invited to select a favorite
poem or a short piece of prose to read
at this spring's Poetry & Prose event.
Or you might read something you've
written yourself. Or you might just
want to be in the audience.

This year's event will be at 7 p.m. on
Wednesday, April 19.

To take part, call or email Paulina
Wilker (908-528-0634) or
paulinadearl@gmail.com). Give her a
copy of what you plan to read.

Publication of
**Pennswood Village
Residents Association**
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Contributing Editors:
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Proofreading: Harriet Maneval
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