



# TattleTails & Tidbits



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## The Mystical Magic of Spring

**T**he saying goes - "April showers bring May flowers" - and true to form, the rains of April came. The flowers, green grass, budding trees, and birds entered the scene right on cue. Like a brilliant and mystical production, the Earth cycled into her exquisitely choreographed dance of the seasons.

From pouring rains that seemingly lasted for weeks, then the resulting deep and everlasting mud, we finally emerged into a world filled with vibrant hues of greens and yellows and reds and the pastel colors of the budding fruit trees. The evergreens got ever more green and growth was sprouting up everywhere.

The horses, donkeys, sheep, goats, and pigs all got to go back out into their pastures and soak in the sun. Our cats were able to have their newly renovated cat porches opened once again to take in all of the sights and sounds of birds and insects returning to take up their summer residence on the farm.

And we humans are filled with gratitude for the life we share with all of these amazing beings in residence in the sanctuary with us. Daily we are reminded by walking among these animals that we have so much to be grateful for in life. Amidst all the turmoil and strife, we need to remember the peace that is there at the base of it all. We need to be that peace. We need to breathe it in and exhale it out.

And we are grateful to be able to share all of this with you - the very ones who make all of this possible in the first place. Welcome to spring and the advent of summer. We hope you enjoy the variety of articles in this issue.

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# The Sharks and I

by Bonnie Reynolds



I have never had any great fears. Except of sharks. I have lived in a variety of haunted places; dealt with poltergeists; shoved a man in black back through my dining room window as he crept in one night intent on doing heaven only knows what to me; lived through terror in the Hollywood Hills from wildfires; plus the fear while living in those hills after the murders of Sharon Tate and the Biancas before the Charles Manson gang was finally arrested ... oh, there have been so many things that I have actually confronted, lived through, that might have left me filled with fears. But no. It was sharks, only sharks.

And this fear was unreasonable. I have never even met a shark! But, back in the days when I went to the seaside, I refused (and this started well before “Jaws”) to go in more than knee deep unless I was wearing a snorkel mask, so that I could spot any sharks that might be lurking in the depths ready to get me. This though, on average, there are 63 unprovoked shark attacks worldwide each year, with five or six deaths. Compare this to about 1.9 million deaths due to autos worldwide each year. (So why don’t I insist on a snorkel mask each time that I get into a car?)

In view of this unreasoning and morbid fear of sharks, something that happened to me back in March of 1980 was a learning experience sent to me from somewhere deep in the pools of understanding. I was in my home in Hollywood. I had been working on my income tax and took a break. I sat down in an easy chair. My Australian Cattle Dog, Mr. Fraser, curled himself up at my feet. I snapped on the TV and ... almost jumped out of my skin. Sharks! Not only sharks, but there were scuba divers swimming right in amongst a pack of them! It was a documentary about a marine scientist named Eugenie Clark, who not only was not afraid of sharks, she loved them! Among other admirable and/or interesting habits, Ms. Clark had discovered that some sharks have dormant periods, during which they hibernate in deep, underwater caves, and there she was, with several of her certifiable associates, swimming around in one of those caves and actually petting man-eaters as they slept. And they weren’t even really asleep ... just in very passive frames of mind. They paid not the slightest heed to the lunatics who insisted upon petting them.

Ms. Clark was worried about the habit that humans have gotten into of exterminating sharks with no provocation except the belief that sharks are bad. Since only a few of the many kinds of sharks in the sea have ever been known to attack Man, and since the purposeless slaughter was on the rise, Ms. Clark worried about the near extinction of some kinds of sharks. The nurse shark in particular, Ms. Clark explained, is a totally benign fish, yet hunters were killing them in wholesale lots, and not even for food ... just for the fun of killing them.

The documentary began to show footage taken by those who hunted sharks. A nurse shark, peacefully foraging for food, was shown. Then ... Bam! The nurse just exploded. Blood and gore filled the screen. Then another nurse. Bam! “Stop!” I leaned forward, shouting at the screen. But the makers of the documentary had no mercy. Nurse. Bam. Nurse. Bam. “What have they done to you?” I demanded of the hunters, and I realized that I had begun to cry. Mr. Fraser leaped to his feet, concerned. Bam, bam, bam, nurse sharks bleeding, writhing in agony, guts spilling, bam, bam, bam. “All the shark attacks in history haven’t killed as many as you’re killing right here!”

But the carnage continued. My sobs deepened to great, heartbroken gasps, coming to the surface as though from out of deep caves of hibernation within my own self. I slid off of the chair onto my knees, hugging Mr. Fraser and pleading with the TV. “Don’t kill them. Please don’t kill any more of them. You’re the predator, not they.”

The devastation on the screen finally ceased. But not my sobs. They gushed as from a gaping wound in my very soul. “I’m bleeding, I’m bleeding,” I heard myself saying, over and over again. I buried my face against the anxiously whimpering Fraser and gave myself to the sobs. The documentary had ended by the time that I was able to even begin to stop. “Poor Fraser.” I laughed brokenly, petting my whimpering friend. I looked at his face for the first time and he

dove forward to lick me, his brown eyes filled with concern. "It's okay. I'm alright, honey." But Mr. Fraser's anxiety would not be stilled. He kept whimpering, watching me as though I, like the nurse sharks, would suddenly explode.

As I retell this story in 2024, it is known that various kinds of sharks are definitely in danger of extinction. The oriental taste for shark fin soup does not help matters. Those fins are harvested with great cruelty. A shark is caught, its fin cut off, and it is tossed back into the sea to thrash about and die, helpless and terrified without its fin. And docile nurse sharks are still being hunted by some for amusement.



And so what happened here? That day some universal wisdom brought me face to face with my greatest fear. At the same time, that wisdom plunged me into depths of compassion and understanding within myself that I had never known were there, that taught me to love the very thing that I so feared.

The lesson of that day has never left me. Sure, I will still refuse to wade into the ocean beyond knee height. The ocean is their home, I am the intruder, and a reasonable fear is still there. But so is understanding there, and love, and a heartfelt caring for the welfare of creatures called Sharks.

While the lesson that I learned that day – my plunge into such deep caring, and realization that every thing, every person, creature, place, and situation, no matter how fearful, distasteful, or seemingly unimportant, is to be cared about, respected and loved – that lesson has never left me.

Somehow that day I was given a taste of the Great Love itself, of the great love that created, sustains and tolerates -- lovingly and affectionately, unendingly and unfailingly -- the whole wonderful world in which we live.

## About TattleTails & Tidbits

TattleTails & Tidbits is a free bi-monthly journal of Spring Farm CARES Animal & Nature Sanctuary. We have an amazingly talented group of Directors and Staff and we started this journal to share both creative writing, inspirational stories of the farm, educational articles, and artwork just to name a few. The purpose of our journal is to give you helpful information and to touch your heart and stir your soul.

There will be stories shared through animal communication with the many animal teacher residents of the farm as well. We hope that each issue gives you a variety of topics from both our animal and nature sanctuaries.

TattleTails & Tidbits is available only in electronic form. You can [sign up for our email list](#) to receive it directly in your In box and/or you can [download your copy directly from our website](#).

[Donations](#) are gratefully accepted and we hope you will share this with those you think would be interested as well.

# Our Wonderful Thrushes

by Matt Perry



*Robin*

In our region, and at our nature sanctuary, we are fortunate to host a variety of thrush species that either breed or migrate through. These range from the familiar American Robin to the elusive Gray-cheeked Thrush, and from the somber-plumaged Hermit Thrush to the stunningly beautiful Eastern Bluebird. Most of these thrushes are long-distance migrants, flying to tropical regions during colder months and returning north to breed. However, some like the Robin and Bluebird are short-distance migrants and can be found here year-round. While neotropical thrush populations face significant conservation challenges, the short-distance migrants seem to maintain stable numbers. In terms of song, several thrush species stand out as true virtuosos, their melodies and styles unmatched in nature.

Most of our thrushes dwell in woodlands, their vocalizations often the only clue to their presence. However, the American Robin and Eastern Bluebird are notable exceptions, and are commonly seen in open spaces. Bluebirds favor nesting in meadows, wooded swamps, and golf courses, while Robins utilize nearly every habitat type, from suburban yards, parks, and cemeteries, to wetlands, barnyards, and forest interiors. They're known to nest under the eaves of structures, accept manmade nesting shelves, and even breed in unlikely spots like on top vehicles or equipment, showcasing remarkable flexibility. This adaptability, coupled with their prolific breeding habits, contributes to the stability of their population. Unlike some thrush species, Robins are seldom hosts to brood parasites like Brown-headed Cowbirds, as they swiftly reject foreign eggs deposited into their nests.

Thrushes, being omnivores, have a diverse diet including arthropods, worms, and occasional small amphibians. In colder months when insects are scarce, overwintering thrushes turn to fruits. Their foraging behavior, often observed in Robins, involves short sprints followed by freezing in an upright stance, as they listen and watch for the movement of prey on the ground or in the leaf litter. Woodland thrushes employ similar tactics, rummaging through leaves to expose skulking creatures. Hermit Thrushes tap lightly on the ground with their toes to mimic rain, prompting prey to move, thereby revealing themselves. The Robin's familiar association with earthworms, a non-native species, highlights its adaptability and resourcefulness, showcasing its ability to innovate its diet.



*Eastern Bluebird*

Among the thrushes, the Eastern Bluebird stands out for its unique hunting strategy. While it may forage on the ground like its relatives, it more commonly hunts from an elevated perch, akin to a raptor. From a dead snag, post, tree, or nestbox, the Bluebird scans the meadow for insects. Upon spotting its target, it swiftly dives to the ground to capture it. Meadows in spring and summer provide abundant prey, and in favorable weather conditions, the Bluebird can be a highly successful hunter. Its menu includes a variety of insects such as beetles, moths, caterpillars, crickets, grasshoppers, Katydid, and June Bugs.

During mate selection and territory establishment, Robins and woodland thrushes may display remarkable

aggression towards individuals of their own species. Intense chases, squabbles, and occasional physical altercations are common as they vie for dominance. These battles typically unfold in the initial weeks after their return to breeding grounds. Witnessing Robins engage in such behavior seems not so out of character; however, observing typically reserved Wood Thrushes engaged in pitched battles is always surprising. In wooded areas, it's not uncommon to witness Wood Thrushes fiercely grappling with each other, seemingly unaware of a human presence. While injuries are conceivable, evidence suggests these skirmishes are largely displays of dominance that rarely result in serious harm. Occasionally, a Robin may mistake their reflection in windows for a rival, leading to futile efforts to intimidate and drive away the perceived intruder.



*Wood Thrush*

together closely on a branch or snag.

Nest construction among thrushes is predominantly undertaken by females, with the notable exception of the American Robin, where the males actively participate. However, males do not assist in incubation. Robin nests are typically robust structures anchored in a tree or shrub; in the crotches of trees; on thick limbs, or on man-made structures. Their nests are composed of mud, sticks, and plant stems, with finer grasses lining the interior cup. Wood Thrush nests share similarities in construction with Robin nests but are comprised of less mud. Wood Thrushes incorporate old tree leaves, particularly from American Beech, giving the nest a ragged appearance and aiding in camouflage.



*Wood Thrush Nest*

In our region, the diverse array of thrush species enriches our landscapes with their songs, behaviors, and adaptability. From the common yet charismatic American Robin to the seldom encountered Gray-cheeked Thrush, and from the enchanting melodies of the Wood Thrush to the dynamic hunting techniques of the Eastern Bluebird, each species brings its own unique contribution to their habitat. While facing various challenges, including habitat loss and climate change, these thrushes continue to captivate us with their resilience and resourcefulness. Whether engaging in courtship rituals, constructing nests, or raising young, they offer us a glimpse into the intricate workings of nature. As we marvel at their behaviors and listen to their songs echoing through the woodlands, we are reminded of the importance of preserving and protecting these fascinating birds and their habitats.

# The Day Max Came Home

by Dawn Hayman

Of course, no one can prove scientifically that reincarnation is real. But whether you believe in it or not, there are just some things in life that defy explanations. This is a story of a special relationship that was destined to be.



*Max on his bed in Dr. Christine's office*

Our story starts the day a cat named Max was brought to the farm. He had been hit by a car which left him bowel and bladder incontinent due to nerve damage. At first, we were hopeful that he might be able to regain use of his bladder but he never did.

We had to manually express Max's bowel and bladder for many years. His bladder was difficult to express and got more difficult as time went on. Eventually, we got to a day where none of us could get the urine out of his bladder. There was nothing left medically to do. We were facing a certain euthanasia decision with an otherwise healthy and very active and happy cat. His veterinarian worked diligently to research and contact surgeons to see if there was something that could be done. But, sadly, everyone agreed that euthanasia was the only choice left.

His veterinarian, as well as all of us at the farm, knew that Max was not ready to die. She tirelessly researched alternatives. And, finally, her research paid off. She discovered that there is a procedure that had been done with dogs successfully to install a port directly into the bladder that could be emptied with a syringe a couple times a day. With our blessing, she sprang into action and found a surgeon who was willing to give it a go – with the understanding that it may not work and then the only remaining option would be euthanasia. Max was totally on board.



*The Max pose when he wanted to be left alone*

The port was successfully installed, and we were taught how to empty his bladder each day. Max tolerated it very well. It worked! This cat thrived with his new life. Previously, he had always been a bit cranky to have his bladder expressed. Now, he was pain-free. Along the way, he clearly had become attached to his veterinarian and she to him.

Now comes the magical part of the story. You see, his veterinarian is none other than Dr. Christine, who is now our very own full-time, on-staff, veterinarian at the farm. We credit Max for opening a door for her to come here. In fact, when she accepted a position with us, it came with one condition – that Max could live in her office. Done deal! And so it happened. Max and Dr. Christine were inseparable. The connection between them was amazing to watch. For months, Max helped shape her office and her position here with us.

But one day, after Dr. Christine had been out for a couple of weeks from a medical procedure, we had the shock of our lives. I was excited to watch Max greet her on her first day back. In fact, I arranged my schedule to be there with him when she came in. Instead, moments before she was to arrive, staff called me with an emergency. They had come in and found Max dead in her office. The shock was unbelievable. He was the picture of health. Everything was going right for him. He was vibrant. And now, he was gone. Instead of watching an exciting reunion, I now had to break the news to Dr. Christine. It was one of the hardest things I had to do. Needless to say, she was



*Tony on his bed in Dr. Christine's office*

heartbroken. We assume he had some sort of cardiac event that ended his life. No one had a chance to even say good-bye. But I knew that Max wanted it that way. He didn't want to say good-bye because he had other plans. He was still attached to his best friend Dr. Christine. And he asked me to tell her that he'd be there with her but now in a way she couldn't see him.

A year later, we built a small clinic here at the farm for Dr. Christine to work out of for our own animals. We named the clinic The Max Memorial Clinic. The clinic is located in what once was her office that she shared with Max.

But this story doesn't end there. This past winter, someone brought in a cat that was caught in a humane trap to see if he had a microchip. He didn't seem feral but had been a stray in the area for quite a while. I was there when he was brought in to the clinic. Dr. Christine looked at the cat and exclaimed, "I know this cat from someplace! I don't know where, but I know I know him." Was he someone that was a patient from the previous clinic she worked at? She didn't know. But she was adamant that she knew him. She scanned him for a chip but there was nothing there. He would stay here for the week to see if an owner could be found.

Monday morning, Dr. Christine arrived to work and immediately said to me, "Could you check in with this cat and see if it is someone I know? I could not get him out of my head all weekend." As soon as she asked the question and I connected with him it hit me over the head. Although they do not look anything alike, our dear old friend Max immediately responded to me and said, "I am back!"

My heart was racing. Would Dr. Christine even believe such a thing if I said it? Is this cat really Max? How would I prove that to a scientific mind? But I could feel his joy. I could feel his spirit. He was in this black and white cat.

I looked at Dr. Christine and said, "Who do you think he is? Who does this feel like to you?"

And you see, it wasn't her scientific mind that needed to believe. Because when she looked at me and I saw the tears welling up in her eyes, I knew she knew who it was. "I'd like to think it is Max." she said. "But how do I know?"

"This is when you have to rely on your heart", I said. "What does your heart tell you?"

She had one question for me. "Can he stay in the clinic with me?"

Needless to say, he is now living in the clinic where he always wanted to be. This black and white cat is now named Tony. And the instant he was let out in the clinic, he went exactly to the old spot where Max used to sleep on her desk. He instantly displayed the exact same mannerisms. He has the same character. And our hearts know the unmistakable truth that Max has come back home.



*The Tony pose when he wants to be left alone*

# My Job

by Trinity Cook

I am often asked how I can do the work that I do, and I never have a good answer. I can never quite put it into words. I have wondered myself how I am able to work around animals who have suffered and who have been mistreated. But I realize now that I, and those people in my life misunderstood what my job truly is.

In my time at Spring Farm I had never witnessed new barn animals arriving from a neglect situation. I had been on the property many times but had never been in the barn to see it for myself. So when the opportunity arose to be there I took it. I waited anxiously along with our other staff. I watched as the trailer backed up to the barn, and as staff went to open the trailer doors. I could feel my heart pounding. What would I see? What would it make me feel? I was dreading the anger and the sadness that would surely follow seeing them.



The doors opened, and out they came. They wore their neglect obviously, matted and disheveled. Yet I could only see how beautiful they were. They looked for a moment around their new home, all the faces looking back at them. In that moment I watched them make a choice. They made the choice to have hope again, the choice to embrace their new home despite all they had suffered. I stood still watching as they lifted their eyes, as they walked out with purpose. They cried out in joy as they rolled around in the saw dust, as they welcomed petting from their new caretakers, as they gave us their trust so willingly. I watched them settle into their stall and rest.

I could find no anger in my heart. In that moment I realized that it is not my job to feel angry for them, to hate for them. There will never be any shortage of people to be angry for them. Somehow, I have the privilege of showing up each day to make the space for them to find peace and love again. My job is healing. My job is to love for them.

I think back to all the times I have lost hope. I see all the awful things happening right now, and how sometimes all I can feel is rage. It is easy to look at it all, to see the struggles in your life, and make it your job to be angry. I have even been told that the only way to make change is to fight, to be mad. But that never sat right in my heart. I lost hope that you can change things by choosing peace (despite there being so little of it). Can you really make the world a better place and create change this way, is this too passive? Is this my copout? But looking back I see now that there is evidence every single day that it works. I see it in the animals that come here. I see it when they realize there will always be food, when they are groomed for the first time, or when they stand in a green pasture as the sun touches their skin.

Hate is loud, anger changes things so quickly, often destructively. That is often why it's our first instinct, I think. But changing through healing is quiet, often slow. Maybe so slow you don't even notice it sometimes. It's like when an animal comes to us malnourished, skin and bones, and they slowly gain the weight back. You don't see the change day to day, and then suddenly and all at once you realize you have a perfectly healthy animal in front of you, and you can't believe how far they have come. They have given me hope again in the life I envisioned for myself. They have given me permission to live in a more peaceful world, to be a part of changing it in a way I had always hoped I could but wasn't sure was possible. Until I realized it was already happening before my eyes, and I get the privilege of doing it every single day. That is my job.