



TattleTails & Tidbits



Spring Farm CARES Animal & Nature Sanctuary Journal

Volume 3, Issue 5, September/October 2024

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Autumn Magic

There is something magical on the farm in the fall as the trees change color and the days get cooler and shorter. Beauty surrounds us in all directions. From the red of the sumac trees to the splendor of the maple trees and the smell of apples and crisp fallen leaves filling the air – it's a time to reflect on the year that we've had. It's a time to take stock of where we are and what we have accomplished over the previous months. And it's a time to prepare for the cold months of winter ahead.

For the horses and donkeys, it is a grateful time that signals fewer flies to contend with and cooler days. But there is also the bittersweet reminder that the grass will not be as plentiful and the grazing time will grow shorter. But it is also a time of camaraderie and friendship as they spend more time together in the barn with each other and their human friends as well.

As the seasons change, we look around at the hope and promise of a new day ahead and the next phase of another year going by. And we are filled with gratitude for all of you who are on this journey with us and make it all become a reality. Happy Fall to all of you!

To learn more about Spring Farm CARES, [to donate to our mission](#), [to sign up for our email list](#), and [to download a copy of any of our publications](#), go to www.springfarmcares.org

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The God Tree

by Bonnie Reynolds



There is a magnificent maple tree in what used to be the back pasture of Spring Farm. A tree expert summoned to examine it believes it to be over 400 years old. We also suspect that, before Spring Farm's first settlers arrived here along about 1798, the tree and the site on which it lives was the object of Iroquois Indian ceremony and veneration.

I first became familiar with the tree back in 1945-1952 when my cousin Gail and I used to roam that back pasture, gathering flowers and playing games. When the game was hide and seek, a favorite hideout was inside a nearly dead, totally-hollowed-out maple tree.

In 1963, Gail and I had both returned on the occasion of a relative's 25th anniversary celebration, when we decided, for old time's sake, to take a walk up into the pasture where we had so often played as children.

As we walked, we caught sight of our old tree hideout. We couldn't believe our eyes. We had expected ruins.

But no. There stood that maple, vibrantly alive, greener, taller, secured into the Earth now by massive, benchlike roots, with the trunk, that had been a curved, rotted-out hiding place for children, having widened outward and formed equally massive wings, all supporting a virtual new tree on top of it all. It had made of itself a whole new incarnation of its "Self".

"There is no such thing as death." the tree seemed to be calling out to me on that day in 1963. "This is what 'God' is all about."

That moment was perhaps the most important moment of my entire life.

Shortly after arriving in New York City back in 1955, I had allowed new friends to talk me out of the religious beliefs with which I had been raised. Torn loose from those moorings, I had foolishly considered myself to have become an atheist.

But in that moment of sighting the tree – of hearing in my heart what it was calling to me -- a whole new understanding of "God", an understanding which has only deepened through the years, flooded through me.

I began to dance. I literally danced, in joyous circles, right up to the base of the tree, crying out as I danced, "This is God! This is something that I can believe in! This is God!!!"

Throughout the following years, whenever I returned home for a visit I would visit The God Tree. I would sit for hours on those wonderful huge benchlike roots, my spine against a wing of the trunk, soaking in "God" and endless in-carnation. When Spring Farm CARES was born and students began to attend Dawn's animal communication workshops, we always made sure to take them up to visit The God Tree, and to soak in its wisdom.

A few weeks ago we had a bad windstorm that took trees down throughout our area, and which finished off a 200-year-old maple that I called "Grampa" in our front yard. Worried, Dawn went up to check on The God Tree. But there it stood, still safe, strong, a messenger of eternal life and a representative of the most powerful Energy in the Universe.

Love.

Dawn's Experience with The God Tree

by Dawn Hayman

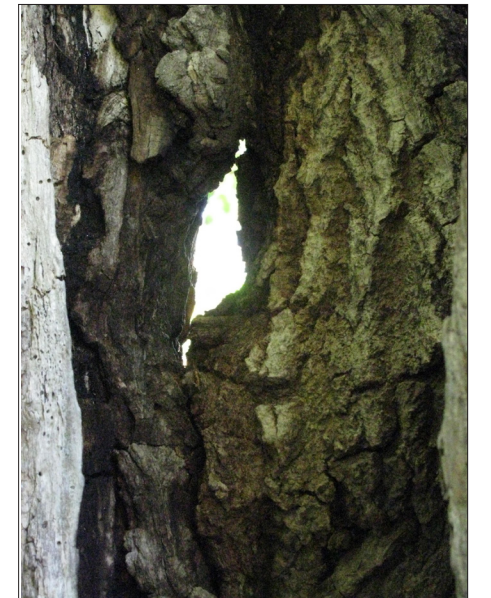
When I first came to Spring Farm in 1986, Bonnie took me on an excursion to meet The God Tree. At first, admittedly, I thought that I was simply going to be introduced to an old, semi-dead maple. That day, however, my education and true connection with nature began, and an understanding of the depth of spirit held within the branches and roots of trees and plants. Over the years, I have had interactions with this beloved tree that have given me ever deeper insights, hopes, and a profound connection with this farm that I am still learning to understand.

Within what was once the totally hollowed-out trunk of the tree, there is a hole that I have always called "the eye" of The God Tree. And I have many times stood within what is left of that hollowed-out trunk, embraced by the ancient wisdom of the tree, and wondered about all that this tree has seen through that eye. From the days of Native Americans passing through, to years of watching any number of wild creatures, and then domesticated cattle contentedly grazing on the hilltop pasture, and finally benevolently guarding our many rescued horses, who have pastured around it and healed beneath the branches -- this tree has witnessed so much.

I have gone to The God Tree many times with a heavy heart, looking for solace. And every spring it has been my tradition to take a walk to The God Tree as soon as the snow melts enough for me to get there. I am always so relieved to come over the crest of the hill and see her still standing strong, having survived yet another winter. But there was one annual walk that was by far the most profound. It was spring of 1994, after our devastating fire of Halloween night, 1993. The barn that burned had been our small animal facility, offices, and living quarters. Literally everything I owned had been lost that night, as well as my five beloved cats -- a time of great loss for me. So that as I journeyed up to the back pasture this time I was praying extra hard that I would find The God Tree still standing tall -- that I would not again be faced with a heartbreaking loss.

And there she was, still standing in all her glory. I stepped gratefully into the hollowed-out portion of her trunk and leaned my back against her bosom. I closed my eyes and felt my feet connect with her great roots. And I simply breathed -- deep, centering, grounding breaths, my heart yearning for healing. As I stood there within her embrace, with my eyes closed, I swear I could feel a heartbeat resonating from her and into me. And as I thought about all of the loss that we had experienced the fall before, and the reality that nothing was the same anymore, I was given reassurance.

The message that I received from The God Tree was powerful. And as I stepped back out from within the tree I saw something amazing that underscored the message. A blanket of ash surrounded the tree. There were tiny pieces of paper as well. I bent down and scooped some up -- and recognized my own handwriting! These were pages from a book of animal messages that I had been working on. How had they gotten up here?! The God Tree stands about 20 acres from where the fire was. Yet, that night some of the ash had evidently flown up to, and encircled, The God Tree. Somehow, now both tree and fire joined to underscore a message of incredible comfort. "All is well. Nothing is lost. It is all still here, just in different form. I watch over this entire farm and stand as guardian. I always have. I always will. Because All is One. All is God."



Devining The Secrets Of The Forest

by Matt Perry



Pit and mound topography gives clues about the ancient forest.

The forest is often seen as a timeless and mysterious place, harboring secrets that whisper of its past. This is especially true for the woods of the Spring Farm CARES nature sanctuary, where over the years, I've attempted to uncover the history of the land through the clues left behind by nature. While much of the evidence has been erased by agricultural practices, some remnants of the past remain, waiting to be deciphered. The clues hidden in the contours of the land, the type of trees present, and the scars of past events tell a story that reaches back through centuries.

One of the most telling features of an ancient forest is its topography. The undulating, bumpy terrain known as "pit and mound" is a hallmark of land that has never been cultivated. Each pit and mound represent the final resting place of a large tree that once dominated the landscape.

The pit is the void left when the tree was uprooted, while the mound is formed from the decayed root mass and trunk. These formations can last for up to a thousand years, providing us with a window into the forest's distant past. In areas of the sanctuary that have remained untouched by the plow, the pit and mound topography is still evident, revealing the locations of ancient trees that fell long ago—most taken down by severe windstorms.

In one part of the sanctuary, I found a section where multiple pits and mounds aligned in the same direction. This suggested that a single powerful windstorm, likely a microburst or straight-line winds, had swept through the area, uprooting dozens of trees. By examining the age of the trees that have since grown atop these mounds, I estimated that the storm occurred approximately 120 years ago. This corresponds with historical records of a severe storm in 1899, which caused widespread damage in the region, including the toppling of a thousand hop poles at Spring Farm. It is fascinating to think that the forest itself can provide evidence of events that happened more than a century ago, long before any living person can remember.

In contrast, a forest growing on flat land with no pit and mound topography likely indicates that the area was once cultivated. The age of the oldest trees in such areas can give us a clue as to when the land was abandoned as farmland and allowed to revert to forest. Stone dumps along the edges of fields and former fields are another indication of past cultivation. Stones that were once buried deep in the soil are brought to the surface by plowing and must be removed. These piles of stones are a silent testament to the labor that once went into farming the land. In addition, terracing—where the land at the edge of a field is slightly higher than the adjacent woodlot or hedgerow—is another sign that the area was once plowed.

The presence of fences also tells a story about the land's past use. Fences were typically erected to keep



Stone fence remnants at the border of an old field.



The mature Yellow Birch that healed over its saw wound.

healthy crown that mingles with the canopy of neighboring trees. Based on its girth and the appearance of its bark, I initially estimated the tree to be around 140 years old. However, I discovered a small cavity near the base of the trunk that revealed what appeared to be an old, bleached tree stump hidden within the newer growth.

This discovery led me to reconsider the tree's age and origin. It appeared that a large wedge had been cut out of the old trunk, apparently with a chainsaw, which confused me since chainsaws were not widely used for logging until the mid-20th century. Birch trees, however, have a remarkable ability to regenerate. When cut down, their stumps often sprout new growth, or the roots send up a new trunk. Initially, I thought this had happened with the Yellow Birch—that it had been cut down, and a new trunk had sprouted from the base, making the tree only about 70 years old. But the bark on the trunk suggested the tree was much older, leading me to conclude that the original trunk had somehow survived the cut. The living part of the wood and bark on the opposite side of the trunk had survived and eventually grew over the gaping wound, preserving the tree's ancient lineage.

In summary, the forest within the nature sanctuary is far more than just a gathering of trees; it is a living chronicle of the land's past. The pit and mound formations reveal the footprints of ancient trees, while the stone dumps and terracing tell tales of past agricultural use. Old fences and regenerating trees echo stories of deforestation and regeneration. Each of these elements contributes to the forest's narrative, demonstrating nature's ability to endure and evolve over time. By interpreting these natural signs, we can unravel the forest's secrets, deepening our appreciation for the intertwined relationship between the land's history and the natural world.



Regenerated Basswood trunks rise from the roots of a long ago chopped tree.

Endings Are Sometimes Beginnings - The Story of Jasmine

by Dawn Hayman

Being a sanctuary, we take in animals for many different reasons. All of them are here because they were deemed difficult or impossible to place for adoption. Many have physical issues, behavioral issues, or special needs that require a lot of medical care and/or special handling. And some of them come because their lives are coming to an end and they suddenly have nowhere else to go. For those animals who come here for hospice and palliative care, we often make the difference in leaving this world alone and abandoned or instead surrounded by peace and love.

Jasmine's story is one such example. Jasmine was about 10 years old. Jasmine's owner had recently died and a family member tried to take her in to their home. But Jasmine didn't get along with the dogs in the home and had to be housed in the basement by herself. Besides being alone, Jasmine also lost a lot of weight and developed chronic diarrhea, leaking stool all over the basement. Her new person was not able to provide medical care and contacted us to see if we could help. While we are full, and taking in new cats is extremely difficult, we used funds from our Serenity Fund to at least get her looked at medically.



When our veterinarian, Dr. Christine, examined Jasmine, the cause of her trouble became immediately obvious. Sadly, Jasmine had a mass in her rectum. It was found to be inoperable. So Jasmine would remain with us for palliative and hospice care. Medications made it easier for her to pass stool and she remained comfortable. But by far, the greatest help for Jasmine was the love and care she received from her caretakers and the medical team here.

While we knew her time with us would not be long, it was clear that she was not done with her life yet. Jasmine went from being an emotionally shutdown cat upon arrival to an outgoing, loving cat who appreciated any and all affection bestowed upon her. Her caretakers went to great lengths to make her feel pampered and cared for. She had soft quilts and comforters on her floor and soft places to sleep. But in the first several weeks she was with us, she surprised us all with just how much she loved to play with her new toys. One toy in particular became her favorite and she would often be seen carrying it around her room in her mouth. Jasmine began to actually thrive here. You could feel her joy as soon as you walked into her room.

Whenever she saw anyone approaching her room, she'd jump up and greet them at the door meowing loudly. And she would purr and purr and look for her snuggle time. Jasmine had us all wrapped around her heart. Anytime that I went in to visit her, she would express to me just how happy and grateful she was to be here. I watched as her inner light got brighter and brighter and I marveled how healing this experience was for her. Indeed, her physical body was declining and she was here for end-of-life care. But emotionally and spiritually Jasmine was soaking up the love of her caretakers and the energy of Spring Farm and taking it all in at a very deep level. I was watching a beautiful process unfold.

Many times, both people and animals, find profound healing and purpose in their final days and even hours of life. I have witnessed this personally on many occasions. Jasmine was very clear that her time with us was important to her. She also understood that she would soon be leaving this body. She was filled with peace and comfort. Jasmine lived with us far longer than we thought that she would. But when she was ready, she left our embrace very peacefully, surrounded by compassion and love. It was just the way she wanted things to go. We were honored to have known this beautiful soul and to help her on her journey.

Finding A Purpose - The Story of Mister and Molly

by Dawn Hayman

One of the many aspects of running an animal sanctuary with over 225 animals is understanding how to stay flexible and openminded to the needs of the animals. This needs to be done on a daily basis. It is not just about assessing an animal's needs when they arrive on the farm, but also to keep reassessing and monitoring as time goes by. Because, just as with humans, an animal's needs/wants/desires change over a lifespan. And sometimes things that we knew to be true the first year they are here, do not remain true as the animal ages and other circumstances come into play. Life is everchanging and, as such, we need to be ever vigilant to how we need to change and adapt to them as well.

The story of Molly and Mister offers a great illustration of this. Molly came to us in 2010. She had been a pampered career show-jumping pony, at the height of her game. Then suddenly her life came crashing down. She rapidly started to go blind. We agreed to take her into our sanctuary and she was brought to us with just a slight amount of vision still left. Molly had a lot of trouble adapting to being retired. She actually turned out to be a highly functional blind pony and still is to this day, but it was hard for her to have lost purpose. Her whole identity had been wrapped up in showing, in being a beautiful show pony. Looking to at least give her company, we paired her up with another blind horse named TJ, and a sighted pony named Annie. Molly and Annie became fast friends. Unfortunately, several years later Annie left us suddenly due to an inoperable colic, while TJ had died before that. So Molly was now alone.

It is Molly's personality and temperament to be somewhat aloof. It is hard for her to rely on humans for companionship. Luckily, a small horse named Henry arrived. He was also in need of a friend, and Molly was perfect. Sadly, however, Henry was here due to a bad accident that he had suffered. His physical wounds proved to be more serious in the long-term than anyone could have foreseen. Once again, Molly ended up alone. Our hearts broke for her.

We could not find an appropriate pasture-mate for Molly for quite some time. But life has a way of bringing surprises that we don't see coming. Mister, is a Standardbred gelding who, along with a mare named Bunny, was left homeless when their owner died and their farm had to be sold. We took them in together at the end of 2023. Bunny was in bad shape with foot problems. Both had had racing careers and both had leg/foot injuries that ended those careers. They had lived in retirement together for nearly 20 years, and Mister never left Bunny's side, standing over her whenever she had to get off her feet to rest. Sadly, Bunny had to be euthanized early this year when we could no longer make her comfortable. Mister was beside himself with grief. We struggled to find an appropriate pasture mate for him. He was growing more and more depressed.



Molly and Mister

It was then that we realized that we actually had two equines with the same need. But could we put a totally blind pony with a much larger Standardbred gelding? We decided to give it a try, and caretakers began walking them around our indoor arena together. Everything seemed to go well, so we tried leading them outside to the paddock together.

Two horses who would have seemed to be the least imaginable as friends, knew that they could be the help that

the other could use. We moved Molly to the empty stall next to Mister, which emptiness had only served to remind Mister how he so missed Bunny. Now, they both have purpose again. Mister has a new friend to watch over, and Molly has a seeing-eye companion to help her navigate around the pasture. We look out to see them graze and even trot around the paddock together, Molly with some autonomy again and Mister with a new project/mission. Together, they will help one another, day by day and step by step.



Introducing Animal Talk Thursdays with Dawn Hayman

We have started a feature on Facebook. Every Thursday at 10am we come to you live, featuring a 20-minute question and answer regarding animal communication. The replay is available on our Facebook page immediately after. We are also posting the videos on our YouTube channel and website as well. See the links below and choose whichever venue works best for you. We take your submitted questions and do our best to answer them all. We hope you enjoy!

Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/springfarmcares>

YouTube: <https://www.youtube.com/@springfarmcares>

Spring Farm Website: <https://www.springfarmcares.org/blog>

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.

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