

Essay

# Before it's gone

BY GAY BRADSHAW

A few years back, I received a call from a biologist living overseas. He had traveled for many years in nature reserves and wilderness areas around the world. After reading my books on psychological trauma and post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) in wildlife, he wanted to share some of his own experiences. His accounts were a cavalcade of fascinating detail and soaring drama, knowledge of which is only acquired by those willing to witness animals up close and personal with patience and keen eyes. Of all of the stories, there was one in particular that has lingered, and, I venture to say, haunted my memories.

The biologist described one day when, deep in the Amazon interior, he sat veiled in a thick hide of green fronds near a small stream. It was just after dawn. The air was pungent with flowers, bird calls, and humming insects. Every inch of the tree canopy and ground pulsed with life. All manner of wildlife was going about its business—eating, drinking, talking, grooming, and socializing. The forest was a mosaic of tapirs, sloths, ants, tree frogs, and vivid green and red parrots flashing by. But despite the vibrant activity, quiet serenity prevailed. Everyone and

everything fitted seamlessly, even the jaguar who disinterestedly co-existed with her erstwhile prey. For all intents and purposes, the scene was a tropical recreation of Claude Monet's "Luncheon on the Grass."

Suddenly, the pastoral cadence broke with a crash of branches and swishing boughs. The biologist was startled by the noise. Tense, apprehensive of who or what menace might be approaching, he remained motionless, waiting. Then, he saw...a cow. The shattering noise was a cow pushing her way through the brush to drink at the water's edge.

To his surprise, the man found that the wildlife were unperturbed. The cow's ungainly entrance had not caused any detectable commotion aside from his own pounding heart. Everyone had continued browsing, grooming, and doing whatever they had been doing. He concluded his narrative with this: "I realized that if it had been I, not the cow, who had walked up, all the animals would have run away in fear. At that moment, I felt lonelier than ever before in my entire life."

The biologist and I remain in touch, sending emails every so often about one event or another. His experience

revealed something beyond words: an unuttered mutuality drawn from the pain of being human. It is perhaps this recognition, and pain, that fuels the deep love for animals that so many humans naturally feel.

People often credit unconditional love as the reason humans are drawn to other animals. Such love is believed to be free of contract and condition. No matter our mood, station in life, slings and arrows of outrageous fortune, and bad hair days, when a cat turns her head with a smile and a dog runs and jumps with unabashed glee upon the glimpse of our return, we feel endless love. We are accepted with no holds barred.

This does not mean that cows and horses do not buckle to their knees from the fury meted out by humans. Nor are cats and dogs immune to human callousness. Neuroscience shows that all animals—including the steelhead, bears, cougars, deer, ground squirrels, coyotes and the wild turkeys who grace our beautiful valley—are vulnerable to emotional wounding and trauma just as any human is. As we are painfully learning with climate change and extinctions, Nature has limits.

The past drought and wildfire threat have taxed us all, including wildlife of all species. The lack of water, browse, and other food which supported our wild neighbors historically has dwindled, the scarcity doubly severe because of increased human habitation and land use.

So when a deer eats your flowers, a ground squirrel digs an inconvenient burrow, a bear eats your apples, or a cougar roams nearby, open your hearts. Let us learn to live around wildlife rather than the other way around. Usher in a new ethic for our neighbors in nature, one of open appreciation, tolerance, sharing, and caring. Share all that you can to help them through this difficult time.

This land is their land, the skies and waters their heritage. By respecting the wild's right to peace and dignity, we recover our own. As poet Joni Mitchell put it, let us not wait to know what we have until it's gone.

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Essays are limited to one per issue and 500 words. Submit your essay and high-resolution photo to gater@applegater.org.

## Donate your hair and share the love

BY MAGGIE SHREVE

Are your tresses overgrown, gray, or shaggy due to last year's salon closures? Perhaps your locks are long and glossy due to statements of non-conformity? Are you thinking of a short, sassy, wash-and-go change? Before you head to the salon or grab those shears, have you ever thought about donating your hair for a great cause?

As a student of sustainable living, I always look for ways to re-use or re-purpose. So, naturally, this included my hair when I was ready to cut it. My hair had grown for eight years and was now down to my waist. I began to wonder if "Locks of Love" was real and if donated human hair was really used to create wigs for children. This is the long and short of how I donated my hair and how you can too.

The first thing I did was Google "Locks of Love." I was delighted to find that they really do accept hair for making wigs for kids. I also discovered a website called Cancer.Net. There are dozens of sites guiding potential hair donors, but this site summed up the process in "5 Simple Steps to Donate Your Hair."

The first step is to choose where you want to send your hair. This will require research, as there are several national and local organizations. I suggest watching "Where Is the Best Place To Donate Hair? A Comparison of Charities" by Farm Dad on YouTube. After watching this and other

YouTube videos, I chose to send my hair to a charity called Kids with Hair Loss. Once you choose your charity, you need to review its specific requirements and make sure you are a match. For example, most organizations require cut hair to be eight to twelve inches long. Some will not accept chemically treated or gray hair, as this hair tends to be too weak to withstand the wig making process. Next, you need to clean and dry your hair. This is important as hair that is transported damp may become moldy.

Now comes the final commitment. Decide if you will cut your own hair or go to a salon. I went to Wicked Sharp in Ruch, where Sandy Reynolds did the honors. Before you cut your hair, you must bind it securely. As you can see from my picture, I used several elastics down the length of both sections of hair. If your hair arrives as a loose mass, it will be immediately discarded! Finally, you must package your secured hair for shipment. I wrapped mine in tissue paper then in a zip-top baggie. I put the baggie in a large manila envelop that I had already weighed (including hair, tissue, envelop), stamped, and addressed. I also included a small donation towards the \$1,800 wig processing fee.

Voila. I have to say that the process of donating my hair was exciting. It was a family effort. My husband helped with my



Before: A bathroom selfie shows the long locks prior to cutting.  
Photo: Maggie Shreve.



After: All done, all smiles.  
Photo: Maggie Shreve.

research, and Mom was involved with the cutting. As much as I might have thought myself Lady Godiva with my long blond hair, I love, love, love having short hair now. Mostly, I imagine a child realizing his or her dream of having a wig made for

them—using my hair! As you can see, it is easy and immensely rewarding. So, please consider donating your hair to a charity or suggest it to a friend and spread the love.

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