



Voices

Rabbit

© C. Schaefer Manette

They cross, this morning, our two seemingly separate realities and activities — your browsing, my walking. And in the fleeting pause of a moment, our once solo dances are choreographed as one dance for two.

In a blur of speed, you hop behind a nearby clump of grass while I stop abruptly where I am on the sand soil, both of us attempting to be motionless. I am distressed with the certainty you can see me, and pray that your perception will allow for differences to slip away. Do you know I can still see you?

Your left hind leg is tucked underneath you. Your right hind leg extends behind you, as though your flight has been suspended and you have been stretched out in time and space. Yet each hind foot is firmly connected with the earth, ready to propel you forward instantly should I, a potential predator, advance towards you.

Still, holding my breath, I notice your side reverberating to the rapid beating of your heart, and my heart responds in kind. My body knows my motionless presence offers you no comfort, and reflexively softens, breathing in deeply, quietly. Air moves right down to the soles of my feet so I once again can become

aware of earth's presence seeping into me. My mind stills. I hear myself whisper, "Relax little rabbit. You're safe," slicing through the presence of fear that cloaks the distance between us. I become aware my breathing has deepened still more, as if I am becoming breath. Simultaneously, your outstretched leg relaxes, your posture shifts. No longer stilled terror, you now sit more comfortably, a rounder form, the rippling of your sides perceptibly slower.



Our duet sculpts a new form. No longer two circles joined tangentially in space, your circle now eases into mine as you turn around and approach me. I feel an inner celebration. Are you entering my sacred circle? I laugh, realizing I had not even established a sacred circle. Perhaps you are allowing me to enter yours.

Perhaps we are in each other's, or our circles already were one and the same. As you approach, your nose quivers, sensing me through the diminished distance between us. I notice and experience deeply how deliberately, full of intention you place each paw independently of the others. Perhaps you are receiving not only earth's energy, but also are perceiving me through your foot pads.

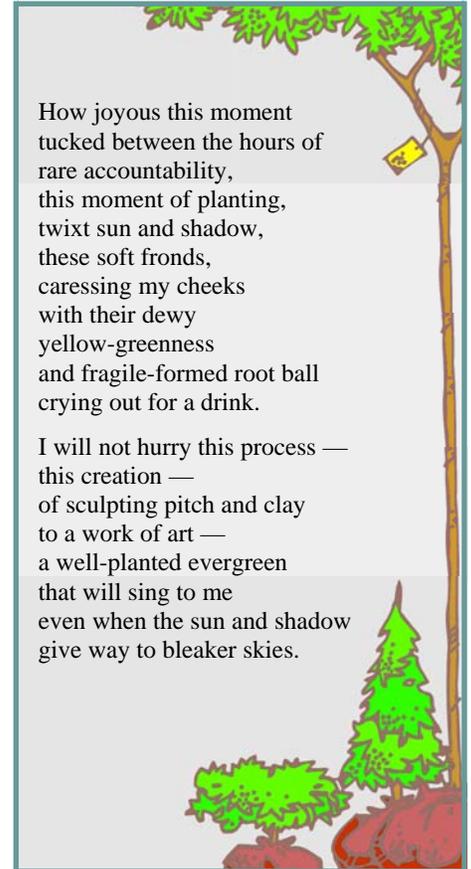
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Sweet Arborvitae

© D. L. Wilke

How joyous this moment tucked between the hours of rare accountability, this moment of planting, twixt sun and shadow, these soft fronds, caressing my cheeks with their dewy yellow-greenness and fragile-formed root ball crying out for a drink.

I will not hurry this process — this creation — of sculpting pitch and clay to a work of art — a well-planted evergreen that will sing to me even when the sun and shadow give way to bleaker skies.



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Rabbit

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You resume your browsing while I continue to stand still, softly, my chest moving with each breath. I note your coloring — your brindle body, the warm chestnut of the nape of your neck and your lower legs, the dark umber edging your ears and accenting each outer tip with a dark circle, the white of your tail and belly. I am amused to see you rock back on your bottom as you chew the low desert plants. Again I am impressed deeply as you place each foot so slowly, carefully as you move from one plant to the next.

Moments pass. I decide to leave. I thank you for your willingness to dispel your fear into softness and allow me to join you. I thank you for trusting me. As I pass you, wanting to maintain your trust, I walk circumferentially around the area we shared, knowing my solo dance will forever be altered by my having danced with you. And you continue to graze, seemingly undisturbed by my motion.



"It's hard to be brave when you're only a Very Small Animal."

— from *Pooh's Little Instruction Book*,
inspired by A. A. Milne

"Man is the only animal for whom his own existence is a problem which he has to solve."

— Erich Fromm

The Afternoon of a Fawn

© Linda Weber

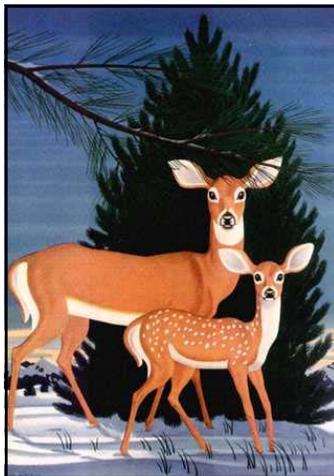
Sweet spotted fawn in the middle of the road. I scared you terribly, speeding toward you in the big loud engine car. I stopped to let you take your time, but you took off in terror and all at once you were on the other side of the barbed wire. Did you go through the fence? Are you cut and bleeding? Did you find your mother, who probably had leaped over the fence with ease?

I want you to be OK. I want it to be OK for you to be young and small and vulnerable. I don't want you to be alone too soon, before you're ready, before you can hold your own. I don't want to be responsible for your pain, just as you would be unable to be responsible for mine.

How is it to be a fawn? You can't possibly be as fragile as you look. You must know that I depend on you to survive. You must survive to know the feeling of leaping fences with no thought at all. I love you and know that *you are love*.

I want that love to be in the world, for the world to make room for you always. In that small body, you carry my hopes and dreams for peace.

Had my truck been any closer or going faster, had I been distracted and not seen you, we could have had a disaster, a bloody mess. But as it was, you got away, ran out of the road, into the trees, where you can look and be like everybody else.



Sister Cat, Brother Cat, New Moon Rising

© Lee Prosser



We, two felines, on the prowl this evening, seeking a path of solitude which takes us directly under the new moon rising there on the horizon, chanced upon a human in repose by the river staring at the flowing water, and therein we did sing our song of nature. She stared at us, the dreamer awakening at last, for within her came the light that told us she was now fine and had cast away all the masks that had hid her from her kind and those of nature, too, such as we, the two felines, on prowl this evening, seeking a path of solitude which has now taken us into the flow of the new moon rising. And the young woman has also joined us in a happy song of remembrance of things past and things yet coming, and we are one family under the same loving moon where nobody wears masks. We have become more than what we are and have become who we are. New moon rising, rising, rising taking us three in embrace on this gentle night which could also be any night your heart intuitively it to be. We are three who become magic in the smile of a silvery moon, and it is your turn to come sing with us. Please come.

"Cats are soft-furred mammals, who are mildly and clumsily predatory. They have anywhere from two to a dozen neurons. The baseline intellect of a cat has two states: 1. Chow state (feeding frenzy); 2. Asleep mode (unconscious on your bed with whiskers twitching)."

— Elaine Richards



Halloween by the River

© Lee Prosser



When your old dog dies, as old dogs must,
When you've lost his patience and love and trust,
When you're sitting surrounded by ashes and rust,
Get a puppy.

For a month or more, you'll pay your dues —
He'll tear your curtains and chew your shoes.
But if you want to break free of the old dog blues,
Get a puppy.

He went away as you knew he would.
He can't come back — that's understood,
And he'd tell you himself if only he could,
Get a puppy.



There was gentleness in her eyes as she
kissed me that Halloween Eve, warm in
my arms; moment of caring and shar-
ing between us, which meant more than
mere words can express. We left the
cabin by the woods and fed the cats
before we left, each knowing the wind
would carry us with our dreams far into
that lovely silver moonlight, as
thoughts of Merry Meet and Merry Part
danced among the stars this night.

“We need another and a wiser and
perhaps a more mystical concept
of animals. Remote from universal
nature, and living by complicated
artifice, man in civilization surveys
the creature through the glass of
his knowledge and sees thereby a
feather magnified and the whole
image in distortion. We patronize
them for their incompleteness, for
their tragic fate of having taken
form so far below ourselves. And
therein we err, and greatly err. For
the animal shall not be measured
by man. In a world older and more
complete than ours they move
finished and complete, gifted with
extensions of the senses we have
lost or never attained, living by
voices we shall never hear. They
are not brethren, they are not un-
derlings; they are other nations,
caught with ourselves in the net of
life and time, fellow prisoners of
the splendour and travail of the
earth.”

— from *The Outermost House*
by Henry Beston



Bird Talk

© Linda Weber

“It's funny how dogs and cats know the
inside of folks better than other folks do,
isn't it?”

— from *Pollyanna*
by Eleanor H. Porter

“If I have any belief about immortality, it is
that certain dogs I have known will go to
heaven, and very, very few persons.”

— James Thurber



No name bird, how do you do?
I've come to share myself with you.
I'm greeting you with no delay
'Cause it's not likely you will stay.
Do you think of me as foe?
I'm really friend, I hope you know.
Before you turn and go away,
There's something that I'd like to say:
I love the way your species sings.
I love the peace and joy it brings.
I love your feathers, don't you know —
The way they fold and shine and glow,
The way they lie down one by one,
The way they shimmer in the sun.
I love to see you fly around
From where I'm standing on the ground.
So thanks for listening to my talk.
I think I'll go and take a walk.

Awakening

© C. Schaefer Manette

Morning rose
Mountain violet
Call me forth
From night
Pearl gray.
I answer.



Mornings with Max

by Alice Spencer

I would have preferred to sleep in the next morning, but sleeping in is not allowed at my house. My older cat, Max, is rather tyrannical when it comes to breakfast. At 6:20 AM, he assumes his position on the dresser next to my bed, leaning over me like a vulture. At 6:22, he commences intermittent yowling. If I'm not up by 6:30, he ups the ante by pushing my belongings off the dresser. The sound of my ceramic candleholder sliding towards oblivion never fails to rouse me. "All *right!* I'm *coming!*" The three of us descend to the kitchen — one sleepy, slow moving woman, and two very excited cats on the run. I split a can of cat food between them and set their bowls on the floor next to the dry cat food that is always available. While Max and Mattie wolf down their food (you'd think I *starve* them, for God's sake!), I open the blinds on the patio doors, grab a Pepsi, and plop into the big wicker chair to enjoy the view of my little yard while ingesting my morning caffeine. Mornings are ever thus. We all need our rituals, however annoying and unhealthy.

— from *The Old Detective's Daughter*
© A. V. Spencer



"Cats are intended to teach us that not everything in nature has a function."

— Unknown

"Cats are smarter than dogs. You can't get eight cats to pull a sled through snow."

— Jeff Valdez

Moment of Intimacy

by Dorothy May



It was a time of great loss and
of even greater freedom.
The Rocky mountains of Colorado.

My fear of heights runs with me
on doubt-filled little feet.
My breath is sucked away
by the altitude and the winds.
The winds blow through me until
I am transparent,
here on the highest ridge
of mountain in my world.

Wrinkled ridge of stone under my feet,
crevice between sheer bone of rock.
Head pulled up mindlessly
to look across the gulf,
startled by an unknown instinct,

Young, many-pronged, he stands still,
stares unmoving into my eyes.
Deep into the well of his eyes I fall,
souls mirrored in the moment of contact.

My heart dances in the
soft light of his heart.
Transported by the most transcendent
LOVE I've ever known in my life,
from anyone on earth, I know.
We speak with our eyes:

Wetly I propel myself
out of the long, dark,
ridged tunnel of birth
to wobble on thin legs.



Month after month
I am suckled,
as furry posts of antlers appear.
My neck thickens, my rump rounds,
my legs grow stump-sturdy.

In my own body, the shaking begins.
Head pounding like hooves
across the forest plain.
Eyes refusing to focus,
filled with blood.
Fear clutching at my stomach
like death is the hunter.

Wordlessly, we speak:
of foraging for food in the frozen winter;
of siring our young and caring for them;
of hiding among the sheltering trees;
of the endless pain of witnessing
the dying and death of kin;

of running freely and safely
in the sunlight;
of drinking at dusk sweet water
from the mountain stream;
of loves we have loved and
of lives we have lived.

— from *Windblown* by Dorothy May
© Patchwork Press

Sage at Gavilan

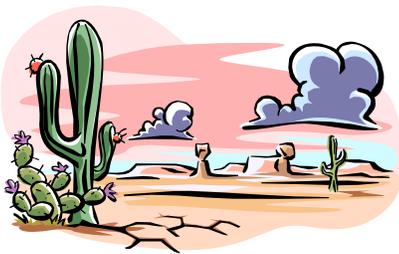
by Ellen Stone Belic

I choose a small piece of sage and take a cautious breath. Not getting enough, I breathe again. The smell of it starts to pull me down. Down, down toward the orange-red fire at the center of the earth I go. Past the pungent whisper of the pinion trees clutching stones soil, I hear their roots scabbling to hang on to the sharp edges of the bony rocks. Dust in my nose. Dry sun-baked remains of clay lifted by breezes that bring no water. My nostrils crack trying to breathe through the dryness, following the scent of the sage.



Past the rabbit tracks and the quizzical deer, their animal smell traces the air like burnt turnips in a forgotten stew, following me down toward the center of the earth. Once under the soil the sage fills my body with its wide abandoning kiss. I gag at its too sweet perfume. It is enough. I want to stop breathing. But it has taken me into its medicinal arms. Now it is breathing me.

Stronger, stronger, its insistent odor beats, moving the bellows of my lungs so that I am forced to take another breath. Though my will tries to push me to the broken rocks above me, I am borne down by the drumming of the sage in my throat, beckoning me toward impending wisdom.



Wild Song

by Linda Weber

Coyotes woke me up last night. They came through my room yipping and howling (some call it singing). They startled me, first awake, then wide awake. There's 800 acres of land here, I'm told. Why did they need my room to cry in? What is it about wild animals that makes them think they can have all the territory, go anywhere they want? I'm tired, and preferring to be asleep rather than have coyote thoughts and reviews of the day.

Actually, I don't think wild animals are out of line. I just want to know the best way to live with them, with their ways, with their song.

There were no wild animals in my childhood, save for in books and zoos. The animals I knew had been domesticated long ago: cats, dogs, ponies, horses, the occasional turtle. Are the turtles they sell in pet stores wild? Probably not, but how can you tell?

I was raised in cities, and there were birds around. Pigeons and other smaller birds, which I didn't think of as wild but who were always around. Are pigeons wild? People used to feed them in the parks in Paris. In Rome and Pisa and New York as well. The birds would come wherever there were crumbs to be had. No one was afraid of them, so it's hard to think of them as wild.

For the most part, I've thought of wild as being scary and uncontrollable, dangerous even. Ranchers and farmers will tell you that wild animals do bad things. Hunters like to kill them.

I think I would prefer to know them better, bring their presence more into my life, see the panorama of their ways, and tap into that part of me that is just like them. Be one with myself the way they are with themselves. Be one with the Earth the way they are with the Earth. No separation between being and consciousness.

My God, if that's what the coyotes were singing about, if that is their song, I would like to sing it with them. I would like to sing along.

"Hear our humble prayer, O God, for our friends the animals, especially for animals who are suffering; for any that are hunted or lost, or deserted or frightened or hungry; for all that must be put to death. We entreat for them all thy mercy and pity and for those who deal with them we ask a heart of compassion and gentle hands and kindly words. Make us, ourselves, to be true friends to animals and so to share the blessings of the merciful."

— Albert Schweitzer

In safety and in Bliss
May all creatures be of a blissful heart
Whatever breathing beings there may be
Frail or firm ... long or big ... short or small
Seen or unseen, dwelling far or near
Existing or yet seeking to exist
May all creatures be of a blissful heart.

— from *Sutta Nipata*, 143-52

Ah Power that swirls us together
Grant us Bliss
Grant us the great release
And to all Beings
Vanishing, wounded
In trouble on earth
We pass this love
May their numbers increase.

— Gary Snyder

Out of the earth, I sing for them.
A horse nation, I sing for them.
Out of the earth, I sing for them.
The animals, I sing for them.

— Teton Sioux Chant



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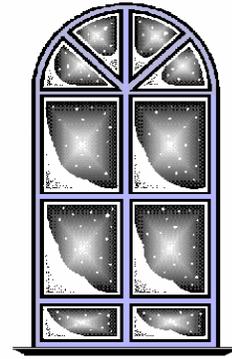
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Submissions: **Voices** encourages creativity! Why not share your efforts with our reader community? Submit stories, poems, and essays by mail, fax, or e-mail.

Themes: Each issue of **Voices** is focused on an announced theme, in addition to a seasonal theme. Content is not necessarily restricted to themes, however.

Next issue's theme: Family and Friends

Submissions deadline: March 15, 1999



Wishing you blessings great and small.
Happy Holidays!

What Happened to Thanksgiving?

© Don Simons

Gone are the turkeys and Pilgrims we loved.
Christmas came early, so they just got shoved.
Thanksgiving's to salesmen a commercial disaster —
It slows all that profit from coming in faster.
An earlier start all the peddlers sure wanted —
A bulging cash register so luscious and vaunted.
No longer are Pilgrims the theme of *that* day,
How can Thanksgiving make merchants big pay?
Christmas came fast — six weeks early, you know —
Store windows all sparkly with pressure-can snow.
Our first celebration of thanks is suppressed.
This greed-gut Christmas has me really depressed.



Our Disappointment

© Don Simons

We entered the mall ... it was promptly at eight,
Beginning to walk and increasing our gait.
At first we had thought it was just a false inkling.
No ... no ... we were right, those *were* bells a tinkling.
Decorations for Christmas we saw far and wide.
That fell really flat .. our disgust hard to hide,
With carols a playing — *that* day we'll remember.
My God! It was Monday, the fourth of November.

The Bonds Between Children of Importance

© Hal Zina Bennett

When meeting, children of importance* acknowledge each other with a simple thought held in the mind: "Let it be as it is." Whether spoken aloud or experienced at a deep intuitive level, this thought acknowledges a specific way of looking at the world, with heartfelt dedication to certain values:

1. A deep sense of connection with a power and a community larger than themselves, with longing, sadness, and feelings of dissatisfaction when this connection is missing.
2. A strong belief that nature is sacred, with a drive to help create an environment that is balanced, harmonious, and sustainable.
3. A desire for simplicity, rejecting material objects and technologies that don't serve to actually improve the quality of inner life.
4. A strong focus on situations that are nurturing and supportive, embracing the values of altruism, equality, nourishing relationships, and making a contribution to a cause larger than themselves.
5. An intuitive understanding of the links between creativity, self-discovery, self-actualization, and action that helps to create a better world.
6. An interest in the spiritual mysteries, belief in a higher power, and a hunger for involvement with mental and spiritual disciplines and activities such as meditation, dedication to a spiritual belief system, and an evolving self-awareness.

— from *Spirit Circle* by Hal Zina Bennett



* In Hal Zina Bennett's new novel, *Spirit Circle*, a sorceress describes important values and sensitivities that will lead us into the new millennium. She calls people who are carrying these values "children of importance."