

The Mountains Are in Us

by G.A. Bradshaw



Preface

I wonder what I ought to tell you about the friendship there was between me and a falcon?

—Carlo Carretto, *I, Francis*

This writing is authored by a human, but its content and essence are guided by a Rabbit. It would never have been written if not for Tommy. In many ways, this collaboration is no different than others. Numerous authors, including scientists, ascribe extraordinary discoveries to sources other than personal analytical operations. Felix Eberty's fantastic science fiction sparked Albert Einstein's theory of relativity. A coiled Snake who appeared in chemist Friedrich Kekulé's dreams led to his vision of the benzene ring. Helen Koch Schucman maintained that she played no part other than a passive amanuensis for an unknown voice to create the dense spiritual tome, *A Course in Miracles*. Testimonies of Black Elk, Mohammed, Jesus, Buddha, Epictetus, and other seers similarly describe how, even while living in the material singular, profound transformations unfold in relationships transcendent of form.

William James attributed these partnered communiqués to the psyche's vast, fluid nature which inextricably connects the entirety of life. While the physical world may appear as a vast assemblage of individual entities embedded in empty solitude, we are immersed in "a continuum of cosmic consciousness, against which our individuality builds but accidental fences, and into which our several minds plunge as into a mother-sea or reservoir."

However accidental they may be, fences of separation can be very real. They have been the source of immense pain and suffering which now envelopes the entire planet. By imagining our species as separate and more intelligent than any other, humans have applied a lethal tourniquet, cutting us from Nature's wellspring and causing Plant and Animal kin to drop and disappear from the body of mother Earth like blood-starved limbs.

According to anthropologists, human exceptionalism began ten thousand years ago with the onset of agriculture. Before, our species lived in synchrony with the Antelope and Bison, guided by Nature's pulse. Agriculture's stationarity changed all this by putting our species onto a path of stubborn detachment. Brother, sister, mother, father Tree, Bear, and Fish were reduced to transactional means to suit human-specific ends. Gathering practices continue today, but they are subsumed into the same consumptive purpose. Mushrooms are hunted with as much predatory

fervor as Deer. Pigs became pork, Bison became beef, and their tender children, veal. Ephemeral thoughts of the imagination are caught, codified and collected into a bank of information wielded by a censorious collective to block the inner light of experience. As C.G. Jung ruefully reflected, all this has left our species stranded on a spiritless beach far from Jamesian waters of origin. “With the growth of scientific understandings so our world has become dehumanized. Man feels himself isolated in the cosmos, because he is no longer involved in nature and has lost his emotional ‘unconscious identity’ with natural phenomena. . .Thunder is no longer the voice of an angry god. . .No river contains a spirit. . . no snake the embodiment of wisdom, no mountain cave the home of a great demon. No voices now speak to man from stones, plants and animals, nor does he speak to them thinking they can hear. His contact with nature has gone, and with it has gone the profound emotional energy that this symbolic connection supplied.”

Now, unable to turn from Nature’s fearsome honesty, we have begun to search for a way back to the fenceless continuum, in connection and compassion with Animal kin. Species by species, brain by brain, western science has dispelled the conceptual illusion of difference yet very few Animal lives have changed, the critical traction point for deep cultural and ethical transformation remains absent. Rabbits, Chickens, Monkeys and Mice continue to be ground down to death by science’s epistemic lust. The lives and loves of Orcas, Elephants, Deer and Salmon are stolen by the clawing hands of conquest and control. How do we engage what we know and bend its power to make the change for Nature’s reparation and liberation? Where do we to start? At the beginning - where all journeys begin.

In this instance, the beginning is where the illusion of separation was first conceived: in the human mind. We must change the very foundation of how we think. “Problems,” Albert Einstein insisted, “can’t be solved using the same level of consciousness that created the problems in the first place.” So, similar to Alice in Wonderland who transformed her body to enter the magical garden, we must transform our minds to fit the contours of Nature’s consciousness again. This is where the Animals live and this is where Tommy led me.

For four years, we spent twenty hours a day, side by side. When no longer able to use her back legs, Tommy moved in with me so I could provide her with what she was unable to do herself. Her physical limitations were minor brush strokes on the canvas upon which her lifelines were drawn. Tommy navigated the world as a Rabbit, but it was only a medium of practical expression for functioning in the Earthly world. She played life in the scale of Rabbit because that

was how she was differentiated when she entered into form. Her life essence was communicated through a Rabbit interface as mine is through that of a human.

Every day, as she lay on the futon beside me, I read aloud what I had written as she diversely munched on Kale, Italian Parsley, Cilantro, and Wild Blueberries that had become her staple by force of health. I do not think she understood individual words making up my writing, but she understood the intent. Tommy accessed meaning by listening carefully, being fully present, her ears tuned to subtleties of the rhythm, tone, and texture of spoken phrases. Their meaning was auditory as well as through embodiment. While for German philosopher, Ludwig Wittgenstein, the “limits of language mean the limits of my world,” Tommy and I were freed from this constraint because our language did not rely on words. We communicated in the “luminous pause between the two great mysteries,” the paradoxical realms of body and spirit, where forms become translucent.

From the substrate of this limitless space, thoughts would rise, taking form as they entered into my human mind as coalescing clouds, then morph into words that spilled out onto a page. I unconsciously and automatically adjusted my perceptions while listening to Tommy’s wordless reflections. In this way, while intertwined in everyday tasks of cleaning, caring, and eating, our lives flowed and unfolded below the fractured, frantic waves of the materialized mind. If there is any doubt about the veracity of this experience and description, one only need steal a glance at quantum physics and its mechanics of entanglement.

The ease with which this happened does not imply complacency on my part. I was astounded by Tommy’s willing care and commitment which made it possible for her inner light to push through the thousands of years old calcified conditioning of my human shell. As a vital reagent in the process, she also changed. Her transformation began when she realized she was no longer seen and known preeminently as a Rabbit, but as the essential consciousness within, the elemental brightness that shines through Earthly form. She understood that I was not making any attempt to hijack her reality. It happened gradually through a series of close and one near-death experiences caused by health challenges. My steadfast accompaniment during these frightening episodes undid any protective fencing.

Tommy was big boned with large feet and long strong ears. When I held her foot, it stretched from wrist to fingertips. Every hair on her body was spotless white. Her gait was awkward and slow relative to others. She had arrived here with eight Rabbits all of whom had been

abandoned in the back yard of a recently sold house. The new homeowner called, aghast, when, after taking possession, he found twelve tiny wire cages, barely larger than the Rabbits themselves, stacked in four rows. The Rabbits were forced to sit on a wire-mesh floor under which there were trays, brimming with mildewing feces. They had been exposed to rain and cold without cover, food, or water for more than ten days.

We bundled them in dry, warm carriers and drove home. All were somewhat withdrawn but eventually, one by one, began to eat and drink. Two of the Rabbits had sustained head trauma and showed related symptoms. Tommy stood out because she showed no emotion. She sat and ate in stolid silence. Over time, she relaxed and fell into a comfortable routine exploring indoor and outdoor habitat. She kept to herself, responding only to Teddy, another white Rabbit and everyone's favourite. "Steady Teddy" would hop up to Tommy to lick and groom her. It was only then that her face and body softened. The doctor said she was much older than the rest and showed signs of several pregnancies. I wondered whether the empty cages we saw had once held her children and if she had been forced to witness them dragged out screaming and murdered. Despite its romanticized image, backyard farming - turf to table- is a brutal and soulless business.

In time, Tommy's legs gave out. Not infrequently, as they age, Rabbits lose the ability to use their back legs, usually because of growing arthritis that neither pain medication, herbal tinctures, nor acupuncture can permanently counterbalance. Unlike other Rabbits whom I have known, however, Tommy's paralysis came on suddenly. One day she was hopping around outside, the next, she lay down and could not get up. This new situation did not seem to faze her. She didn't struggle to gain ground - she just stopped trying to get up. It was as if she decided that it was time to start a new lifestyle. She showed no signs of despair or distress - instead, she showed a kind of a determined contentment. For a while, Tommy pulled herself along with her arms, nibbling various grasses and dandelions. Eventually, she gave that up too. At this point, she moved into the studio.

Most days, Tommy lay on the futon next to me while I sat typing or talking on the phone. She was alert and engaged, content to diversely eat her greens nonchalantly and listen in to inside and outside chatter. We had daily "spa" sessions which included nail clipping, brushing, washing those places that she could no longer reach, massage and physical therapy - the latter less for pain than to reduce the stiffness in her legs and prevent further discomfort.

In between, we went on outdoor excursions. As the wind blew past, she raised her head scenting the freshness of Apple blossoms, sweet grass and Cottonwood lining the creek. We ventured forth together even when weather was inclement, during Fall's overcast and Winter's northern bite. These occasions were particularly invigorating. There is something so fresh and affirming meeting Nature on her no uncertain terms.

Garbed in coat and boots, wrapped in a thick scarf, I carried Tommy out in a lined and covered box so she could snuggle in warmth. We sat together, side by side in two arm chairs taking in the field's expanse and mountain reaches. The air was thick with quiet, but carried a vibrant, expectant silence. There's always something going on. Unless it is very cold or snow too formidable, Deer, Squirrels, and Juncos - those bouncy black and grey commas who dot the land, are lacing through or beneath the Trees. They may be slumbering, but the evergreens keep an eye half-peeled. We were watched.

These halcyon days together did not last. Tommy developed two chronic conditions which threw a shadow on her otherwise bright countenance. She began to experience painful abdominal stasis. It is almost a universal symptom in domesticated Rabbits when they fall ill or are injured. Stasis is when the gastrointestinal system slows and stops resulting in constipation which, if it lasts too long can lead to fatality. Motility medications, syringe feeding, massage, and sub-cutaneous fluids are administered to get the gut moving additional to treating the underlying illness itself. Hypothesized etiologies for Tommy's symptoms varied, and in the end, remained inconclusive and unknown. Sometimes there was an infection, other times not, so it was difficult to ascertain which was cause and which was effect. These episodes were very distressing.

Severe constipation is not only painful but anxiogenic. I spent endless efforts not just administering the treatments- which in themselves are stressful - but trying to reassure and distract her from the discomfort, seeking to tempt her with Mint and Italian Parsley, a tiny piece of Apple - anything to get her to eat a little to stimulate her digestive system. She then developed a second health issue, periodic regurgitation.

Rabbits do not have the anatomy and physiology for vomiting. This means that if she choked on something - ate something the "wrong way" - she could not expel the object. Seemingly out of nowhere, Tommy would gasp and choke. During these episodes, there is not only an inability to breathe but the possibility of aspiration which can later lead to pneumonia. No one seemed to know why this was happening but eventually, an Animal doctor, retired in France,

who had worked in a biomedical laboratory for thirty years monitoring Rabbits used as test subjects for human drugs, suggested a motility medication. The cause, he asserted, was due to physiological defects brought on by genetic engineering - so called selective breeding. While Tommy took the medication daily as a preventative, incidents reoccurred. One episode was near fatal.

Because I needed to hear Tommy during the night, be aware if she was having some discomfort or issue, I slept on the floor next to her bed. This also allowed me to change her bedclothes to keep her comfortably dry and clean. Later, it occurred to me that we could lie together side by side on the four-poster bed and so we made that switch. But, that night, we were sleeping on the floor. I was woken by Tommy choking. I turned on the light to find her writhing, struggling to breathe. She began to scream. I picked her up and held her loosely while trying to smooth down her throat in the hope that it might move whatever might be stuck in her throat. She screamed again, her mouth opened wide, tongue protruding and eyes bugging out, terrified in sheer panic. We both hung in a timeless moment knowing that she was dying . . . Then, remarkably, after what seemed an interminable time but probably less than a minute something resolved and Tommy began to breathe more freely. It took quite a while for her to regain normal breathing and recover. I gave her the wild Blueberries that she loved and she began to eat.

This was the most extreme choking incident. It was a miracle she had made it through this horrifying experience, but the way forward was not clear. Tommy's health had been declining for some time. Treatment became increasingly more intrusive and her spirits began to falter. One bodily function after another seemed to be failing- her colon, her ability to swallow, her respiration, heart, infections. . . Each condition was treated variously, but as time went on, her care became increasingly dominated by treatments, all punctuated by choking events, pain, and on and on until it was clear that suffering outweighed her life force.

Weak, dispirited, refusing food of any kind, and in increasing pain, Tommy lay flat, eyes closed. She was drifting away. The thought was devastating and sickening but it seemed that the time had come to help her pass. Given the distance we live from medical help and an aversion to subjecting her to the stress and confusion of being taken from home to hospital, her doctor had prescribed pain medications which could ease any severe discomfort during her passage to death. I went to the refrigerator where the medicine was kept in a closed basket and took out a syringe. I stroked her head and body and administered the sedative. She quieted a little. I remained with her, stroking her head, hands and beautiful feet. Tears flooded my cheeks. Her breathing was still

rough so after a while, I administered a second shot, shaking with the knowledge that I was helping her leave this Earth – and me. This went on for about an hour, until finally, she relaxed completely, closed her eyes - and died.

I remained next to her, touching her head and repeating her name softly, telling her all was well, how much I loved her, how she would be greeted by my entire family, human and otherwise. After a few minutes I brought down the stethoscope. I could not find a pulse, nor hear her heart beating. Not a sound, not whisper of breath nor tapping of heart. I tried again. Again, nothing. I lifted her head and kissed her – she was lifeless. I rose to gather sprigs of Rosemary and Lavender and lay them around her with a few wild Blueberries. I sat down again, resting my head next to hers, stricken in a bottomless void when her spirit left.

I don't know how long it was, so, when I thought I felt her move, I knew this could not be so – I must have imagined it. I bent down my head again next to hers. But no, there it was. There was a distinct sound and movement against my cheek. My head jerked up to find that Tommy, her eyes still closed, was nibbling on a Blueberry. I literally shook my head and blinked my eyes. I reached out and touched her cheek at which moment her eyes opened and she continued to eat the rest of the Blueberries as if nothing had happened.

While she calmly nibbled, I abruptly stood up, disoriented, dizzy, my head, spinning. Suddenly, the world dissolved, as if the space, air and sky, had opened into infinite vastness and blinding light. I looked down at Tommy. She was sitting up, her face wearing her usual expression of contentment and kindness, leaning down to lick her hand and arm. Everything was as if nothing had happened but the world which I inhabited had transformed. I had not moved but I had traveled, or rather been enveloped by, a completely new realm of existence. *Grace*.

When I recounted to two doctors what had happened, they both said that it was obvious that Tommy had a strong heart and constitution and perhaps the sedative had calmed her gut. They did not comment on what was clinically a near death experience. Gradually, Tommy healed from her depleted, pained state.

At first, life as usual seemed to have resumed for Tommy, but I saw that her openness had blossomed further, her inner being became even more translucent. On my part, the experience was visibly profound and transformational. After Tommy's near-death experience, any sense of separation, any sense of a distinct self, was gone. I no longer straddled her world and my human one. Yes, we still occupied two forms but the centroid of my reality dropped into a shared, still

space. Our two realities melted into one, or more accurately, the force field of separation generated by what physicist David Bohm described as the human thought system of fragmentation, collapsed, and - a bit like Dorothy's discovery of the ruby slippers in Oz - I found that I had never left home. I was never human after all.

Tommy not only changed my life, she changed my reality. She showed me that an individual self does not exist in the singular. Humans egregiously mistake diversity as difference. It is only when we understand that differences expressed in form are nothing more than glove to hand of the presence within does an understanding of Nature's miracle realize.

Beneath the dazzling garb of an iridescent Hummingbird, undulating Cobra, or the stark white of an arcing Seagull is oneness. The bodies we see and touch - and love - are merely its various guises. When we gaze at the rugged face and torso of a hundred-foot Ponderosa Pine and grasp that his self is intermingled with our own, we are awestruck. This revelation is similar to the discovery that a single Herring is not isolated, but a fractal of a Herring school, a Starling is not one, but the boundaryless, murmuring flock painting the sky. Life's many colors are tips of glaciers which point, fingers to Moon, to the depths of consciousness and cosmos in which we all derive. Spiritual awakening, grounding in the invisible depths of life beyond the material, may be personal, uniquely experienced by each unique form, but our authentic self, our true nature, emptiness, Allah, Yaweh, the Christ, deep "I," presence, or its other, myriad names, is, by definition, plural. "I" is indivisibly "we" and Nature is us.

Looking back, I see that my life has been a prelude to meeting Tommy. Most of what I have learned is not things told. It is simply being with Tommy, other Animals and Trees and a handful of sterling humans which have been the most significant sources of learning. Exchanges which began as conceptual discourse, instantly dissolved into the presence of being and experience. Formal contemplative practice has served as a reifying mentor that reminds me to listen to what lies within. Together, they nourished rootlets connected to an ancient episteme and ontology, a way of knowing and existing, which, while illuded to in thoughts, words, and gestures, remains nonetheless, ineffable, common to all Life. Every Animal and Plant whom I have met conforms to Nature's simple set of ethics and principles which is why Nature retains internal coherence and outward peace no matter what changes occur. They know no other way.

The journey back to Nature Consciousness - the place where Animals, Trees, waters and stars live - demands vulnerability - the relinquishment of certainty, knowing, and material ground

for the embrace of uncertainty, unknowing, and the ephemeral. It is a full-bodied leap from the rocky pinnacles of fear into the oceanic depths of love. This is what Tommy taught me and this is her gift.