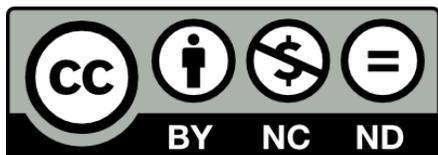


# **Liberating Wings**

## **Freeing People and Parrots Together**



LoraKim Joyner



One Earth Conservation, 2018

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*Cover photo by Christianna Martynowski*

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**I Wish I Knew How**  
- Billy Taylor and Dick Dallas

May this song, used as an anthem during the 1960's Civil Rights Movement, live on, daring us to  
rise and rouse for coliberation

*I wish I knew how  
It would feel to be free  
I wish I could break  
All the chains holdin' me*

*And I wish I could say  
All the things that I should say  
Say 'em loud, say 'em clear  
For the whole world to hear*

*I wish I could share  
All the love that's in my heart  
Remove all the doubts  
That keep us apart*

*And I wish you could know  
What it means to be me  
Then you'd see and agree  
That every one should be free*

*I wish I could give  
All I'm longin' to give  
And I wish I could live  
Like I'm longin' to live*

*And I wish I could do  
All the things that I can do  
Though I'm way over due  
I'd be startin' a new*

*I wish I could be like a bird in the sky  
How sweet it would be if I found I could fly  
Oh I'd soar to the sun and look down at the sea  
Then I'd sing 'cause I'd know how it feels to be free.*

## **Preface**

My name is LoraKim Joyner. I identify as a white human heterosexual female of European descent raised in the southern USA in the lower middle class, 2 generations from Alabama sharecroppers, currently living outside of NY City. My childhood was full of experiences and hard lessons taught from family, friends, the surrounding society, and a dominant oppressive culture that enculturated within me the trappings of privilege, white domination, human domination, as well as victimhood. I am also a mother and grandmother of people who identify as of European/indigenous descent from Honduras. My work in the world is as a conservationist throughout Latin America, wildlife veterinarian, Unitarian Universalist minister, and a Compassionate Communication trainer and practitioner. All of this history and categories of oppression and oppressor cannot be unwoven from my relationships or these words that follow. I am caught in a web that intersects all our lives and that thrives on core oppressions of domination which leads to inequality, patriarchy, colonialism, and white supremacy. I yearn to do all I can to reweave a different story of how we live together, and to get there I long to listen to you, your experiences, and identifies. For this reason, I place hope in this book and your engagement with it, for I do not know how it feels to be free, but together, we might.

## Prologue

Moses was adrift in the world, his mother fearful to stay with him. As a baby he was taken in by the oppressors, beloved. He grew up to be a symbol of liberation for his people. Moses was a parrot.

I knew Moses parents from afar, for I observed their nest in Southern Guatemala hoping to document successful hatching of the eggs carefully tended by the mother yellow-naped parrot. On the third straight day of nest observation, I was anxious because I hadn't seen the parents for two days. I feared they had abandoned the nest, or the chicks had hatched and been poached already. If nest trees were climbed in the first few weeks after eggs were laid, the probability of parrots abandoning the nests was higher. In this case, poachers were climbing the tree every day waiting to take the featherless pink chick from parents so he could be sold into the illegal wildlife trade

Our climber went up the tree to check on the eggs, and down came the bad news. There were two eggs, one nearly buried in the nest litter and one half-buried. Burying eggs was a sign of abandonment. I hate to move eggs, but if they were abandoned there was no choice but to take them to the laboratory and do a necropsy. At the base of the tree I did a superficial candling of the eggs by holding them up to the sun and examining them through a short, dark pipe. The embryos were older than the second trimester of incubation and there was no movement.

Thinking the eggs were dead, for nothing could survive three days without parental incubation, I placed them in our field padded cooler, which I placed in our black truck, whose windows we raised and doors we locked as we walked to a neighboring ranch to climb two more nest trees. By the time we returned to the truck it was 95 degrees and the relative humidity was near 100%, as our soaked clothes testified. Anxious to get home because this was Saturday and a half-day of work, I quickly drove through the bumpy back field, and onto the pitted road. About half-way home I moved the soft cooler up off the floor so the eggs wouldn't become addled before necropsy. Nothing could have survived the heat and bouncy car.

Before opening the eggs at the laboratory I candled them with a professional candler in a dark room. In the focal light of the candler, I thought I saw movement and a heart beat. At least in one egg, the chick was still alive, defying all odds, despite three days without incubation or parent protection, poachers, and a hot bouncy field truck. We might have been overjoyed, but we knew that the chances of this chick hatching were minuscule. Variant temperatures over the last three days and rough handling on the way to the lab would surely weaken the embryo, and it would die before hatching. It's usually in the final few stressful days before emergence that chicks are likely to succumb. They have to not only switch from egg membrane respiration (air exchanged through the shell and across a placental-like membrane) to full lung use, but they also have to peck out of the egg. We didn't give either egg much of a chance.

A week later our fears were realized. One egg wasn't developing and its bright-red blood vessels were dissolving. The second egg had grown quiet. No movement was detectable through

its dark shadows, not even a kicking leg or raised beak. I was about to necropsy it when I felt a movement in the egg. Returning to the candler I saw a small beak rise up out of the ball-like creature, and through the egg came a faint chirp. I placed the egg into the incubator, and over the next few days it cracked one dent into the egg shell, but no more. A delayed hatching was worrisome and usually meant that we had to help the chick out of his egg.

We scheduled this one Sunday morning, and I was able to get the chick out. He was alive, but barely. Smaller than he should have been for hatching and affected with scoliosis and opisthotonos (curved back and head extended back over the spine), he would probably not survive his first week. To give him the best chance I took him home. Fighting his sluggish digestive system, I got enough food into him that he began to gain weight after a week. By the end of the second week his back and head were normalized and he had become a strong and demanding chick.

His survival perked up our conservation team, after the poor reproductive success of the birds in the wild. Of the 23 active nests that year in 1994, only four had successfully fledged young, for the rest had been poached. The native biologists, descendents of disappeared indigenous cultures, called our chick *Moises*-- Moses--, for the chick was like a biblical prophet telling them of a promised land, where the earth would be free of the plagues of oppression in its many forms. The story of Moses, and the many like him, can soften the hardest heart, and show us a better way towards liberation for all.

## Introduction

People and parrots have not won freedom yet. For them to fly free, they must be liberated from oppressions. Since they share the same causes of oppression, their path to freedom is a coliberation event through struggle and grace. Freedom also requires an understanding of intersectionality where oppression impacts others differently based on their various identities. The term was introduced by Kimberlé W. Crenshaw<sup>1</sup> in 1989 when she discussed black feminism. The use has changed over the years but began with this premise: Oppression harms women in some ways differently than men, and people of darker skin tone differently from lighter skin tones. Hence in the USA black women experience oppression in a particular way by being both black and female. Identities are harmed by oppression in particular ways, and the corollary to this is also true: oppression benefits us in particular ways. Humans benefit from a system that oppresses others based on our identities and locations of privilege. I am white human North American from the lower middle class - this gives me privileges that others have, and oppressions that others don't have.

Intersectionality also means that there are core oppressions that intersect all. Some call this patriarchy, a culture based on seeing different others as less than, which is domination of others. This is the origin of white supremacy, inequality, colonialism, and human exceptionalism, all of which catch each of us in a sticky web of harm and benefit. In summary, intersectionality is the awareness of how core oppressions harm multiple identities and species and intersectional results from this awareness by attending to the common roots of oppression across our biotic community.

The ills of society are often framed as a forced choice: we must choose a single human demographic or one species over another for justice work. This false dichotomy is the antithesis of intersectionality and thwarts our efforts for coliberation. Our lack of freedom arises from the domination mindset, not from pitting ourselves against one another based on our identities.

There is no easy path to freedom, for the reaches of oppression are long and durable. We have been taught through a domination filter, that we have to choose our well-being over others, that coliberation is not possible, and that there will always be losers and losses in a global economy. People find it hard to grasp that there might be another way and that well-being is deeply interconnected, as is freedom. Coliberation recognizes that we all are imprisoned, and that none are free until all are free. In my 31 years as a wildlife veterinary and 20 years as a minister, I have repeatedly seen how hard it is to connect the well being of humans to the well being of other animals. We don't know how to talk about core oppression and the interconnections of oppression, and therefore we can't envision the steps we need for coliberation. We even struggle to understand what a life of liberation would look like. Liberation means freedom from limits on behavior and thoughts, so long as no harm comes to others beyond what is absolutely necessary for survival, such as eating a plant based diet that harms plants, insects, worms, and vertebrates caught in the planting and harvesting process. Parrots are far from free with the wildlife trade

and captivity limiting their natural behavior and autonomy, and people, especially in marginalized communities, have limits to their behavior, thoughts, choices, and opportunities. Coliberation happens when alleviating the causes of harm to one group aids another group, resulting in a flourishing life for all.

Because these concepts are so difficult, and so new, and challenge the way most of us were acculturated, I offer this book. It concentrates on stories and reflections, with sections on science and critical thinking, though in other resources and writings I use both science and critical thinking to put forward an understanding of coliberation, intersectionality, interdependence, and biotic justice. We begin with the lived stories of actual beings to connect to a gestalt, a vision, and an emotional understanding and response, necessary for justice and coliberation. These stories and the subsequent action steps are also concrete and understandable in the here and now. I hope this approach fuels a bottom up approach - coliberation begins with you and everyone else. No one gets left behind. And no one is beyond responsibility. Life claims us into belonging and sharing, and does not demand that we should despair or be burnened remain with de-energizing guilt or shame. We are all oppressors and oppressed and we are all capable of lighting that burden for life on this planet.

I focus on parrots as the nonhuman example in need of coliberation as a result of my 31 years of working in parrot conservation in Latin American and the Caribbean. They are what I know. They are also in dire need of liberation because they are the most endangered group of birds on the planet. They suffer extensively in the illegal wildlife trade and in captive situations.<sup>2,3</sup> Furthermore, they are a popular companion species, dear to many people and beloved. Parrots are charismatic and capture the imagination of humans because they learn human speech, they fly (when allowed), they are bedecked in bright colors, are social, and many, especially when they are young, enjoy touch. As representative avian species, they are a symbol of freedom and liberation. They are more than symbol, however, for their well-being is tied into the well-being of the biotic community which includes humans. As seed dispersers<sup>4</sup> they contribute to plant and tree biodiversity, which in turn mitigates climate change and improves the health of the forests, which helps other wildlife and people. Parrots are valuable and sensitive indicators of ecological health. measuring their nesting success and reproductive success parameters allows us to determine the extent of climatic change and health of the forest.<sup>5</sup> Poaching rate also indicates an overall index of extraction. If people are taking the parrots, they are harming other wildlife as well. Finally, their fate, as species largely occurring in colonized lands is closely tied to the oppression of humans. Parrots are an excellent way to focus attention on the intersections of oppression and the need for coliberation.

To produce this book, I have gathered previous writings of mine, as well as written some new pieces that correspond to the intersection of people and parrots in regards to intersectional justice. Each chapter stands alone though the momentum towards healing and action builds through each succeeding chapter. Even still, the chapters can be read in isolation, serving as

reflection or journaling exercises, either individually in groups. The discussion questions at the end of the book serve as a guide for deepening and processing the material.

The writings are arranged in three sections. In the first part are essays and reflections on the impact of core oppressions impact on both people and parrots. Following this is a section on how we might respond to these intersections in general terms, with an emphasis on racism and marginalization reflected through my own European white descent, USA citizen privileged voice. The final section includes action steps and projects that specifically address the "how to" of coliberation of people and parrots. The "how to" cannot occur without reflection and community, so samples of discussion questions for each chapter follow this final chapter. The book then ends with references and resources.

This book is a work in progress and is only the first edition of many. It is a dance and it is art that the community produces together as a tool for listening, sharing, and embodying freedom. Therefore, I look forward to your comments, stories, and experiences to continue to grow this book on the coliberation of parrots and people (and hence with all of life). I am also open to edits and suggestions on the writing and layout of the book. Liberation is our shared work after all.

## **The Intersections**

*Liberation can't happen until we change the way we understand oppressions.*

- Aph Ko<sup>1</sup>

## Mourning Over Puerto Rico

June 2018

The sun rose before me, shining on the tropical rainforest-covered mountains of El Yunque behind me. With the Atlantic Ocean frothing over my bare feet I looked out beyond the far horizon, yearning to look anywhere but within. I'd had enough of that the past couple of years, having recently left war-torn Guatemala where I had led an international parrot conservation project. The violence, danger, and loss of human and parrot life had left me with symptoms of post traumatic stress syndrome and a hopelessness that nothing could ever be done ever to save the people and parrots of Latin America and the Caribbean.

I yearned for some kind of breakthrough, and with that longing saw my presence on Puerto Rico as a parrot pilgrimage. Going back to the roots of European derived violence in the Americas, perhaps I could detect a pattern and find a solution to go forward. The Caribbean islands were the first places in the Americas where parrots were extracted for the pet trade and the first places where they went extinct. They were also the first places where people were imported, kidnapped from Africa for the slave trade, and the first place where native cultures went extinct. Before Columbus arrived, there were an estimated one million birds and 600,000 Taino Native Americans on Puerto Rico, which these people called Borikén. By 1973 there were only 13 parrots left on the whole island in El Yunque National Forest and perhaps a little over 1,000 people who identified as Native Americans (though 61% of Puerto Ricans have Amerindian DNA). Yes, the violence of colonialism began here, but so did the hope of parrot conservation, as the first comprehensive parrot conservation book was written here about the Puerto Rican parrot and it is one of the most successful parrot conservation projects of all time.

I was in Puerto Rico in the mid 1990's on a grant from the US Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) as a veterinary consultant from North Carolina State University's School of Veterinary Medicine. The USFWS had hired me to help improve the breeding output of the two aviaries in Puerto Rico and to produce protocols to release the birds back into the wild. My self-imposed goal was to heal myself and see if I could continue working on front-line parrot conservation in the Americas. It was unclear if I ever could. But that first morning, giving it my best shot, I plunged into the sea and into the project, letting the work and the ocean vista and waves wash away my nearly constant tears over the devastation of habitat loss and nearly 100% poaching in Guatemala, which I was powerless to stop.

What I learned about the people and parrots of Puerto Rico alleviated only a tiny bit of that powerlessness. Though situated in paradise, the island was gridlocked with traffic, unemployment, debt, and the violence of gangs and the drug trade. Most of the existing parrots were not free flying, but were held in breeding cages, so that their young could repopulate the island. Considering how much money was going into the project, it was still not clear that the birds could ever recover. Those early years of parrot releases were not in Puerto Rico, but in the Dominican Republic. There I found myself once again on a beach with a national forest behind

me. The tears were still flowing and the sadness had not alleviated. It didn't help to know that this was the island upon which Columbus first landed. Taking Hispanolan parrots and native Taino people back with him to Europe, he was the first to embody colonialist extraction.

The rise of Spanish culture on Puerto Rico led to the destruction of the Taino culture and rapid diminishment of Puerto Rican parrot populations. The native peoples were wiped out due to disease, warfare, and slavery. Their demise was much quicker and more complete than the parrots'. By the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the Taino assimilation was complete, but flocks of hundreds of parrots still flew on the island despite habitat loss. The human society that replaced the Tainos was considered at that time to have the strongest economies and cultures in the Caribbean, despite the fact that colonization had terminated other peoples and parrot species.

Then came a second wave of colonialism when the USA got involved. In 1898 they invaded the island and wrested ownership of it from Spain. They devalued the Puerto Rican currency, making it easy to purchase smaller coffee farms to turn them into sugar cane plantations. Ultimately, sugar cane companies took over 75% of the land. The people's economic and mostly sustainable base was demolished, and what was left of the island's patchwork forest was quickly deforested. This is shatteringly close to the story of Guatemala I experienced, where sugar cane conglomerates came into our conservation area and took habitat, nest trees, and yellow-naped roost sites. One roost site had transformed from over 250 parrots spending the night in a few trees to zero birds in 2016, and then as a final insult, the conglomerates took down the century old trees for an irrigation system to eke out a few more acres of sugar cane. The South Coast of Guatemala has become a desert of industrialized farming, disastrous for the parrots, and the people too. The sugar cane production continues there, for now, but in Puerto Rico the sugar economy collapsed after World War II, leading to a mass exodus of people from the rural areas of Puerto Rico to urban San Jose and then to the USA. They left behind their homes and a wasteland behind.

By the time I go there and the decades following, there was not much left to extract from Puerto Rico. A complex array of business policies and tax structures continued to impact the economic health of communities and lower their resilience. For instance, the Jones Act restricted shipping, making imported goods more expensive in Puerto Rico than in the USA. USA tax code Section 936 shifted the tax burden from stateside corporations to Puerto Rican domestic businesses, and very low Medicaid funding by the US federal government strained the commonwealth's budget.

In the meantime, after the parrot population's low point in 1973, the birds started to make a comeback. A conservation consciousness was brewing among the people there and extreme efforts were made to save the parrot from extinction. Many people did and continue to do amazing work to bring back the splendid biodiversity of the island. Aviary production improved in the 1990s and multiple releases of parrots led to three populations of wild parrots on the island

where there had only been one – and the bird population in aviaries and in the wild by 2017 was over 600.

Over twenty years after I first traveled to Puerto Rico, and a much longer journey of recovery work, the dream of free flying stable populations on the island seemed feasible. I too had been on a journey and had mostly recovered from the losses of Guatemala. I was now working in several countries in Latin America. The heartache, though ever present, was manageable. I could almost imagine massive and wide scale parrot and people recoveries, though the parrot populations and human communities remained fragile throughout Latin America because of centuries of colonization and extraction.

That fragility may never end. Puerto Rico suffered a direct hit by Hurricane Maria in September 2017. El Yunque was leveled and only two of the 60 birds that had been there are still alive, with 74-86 of the 134-160 free flying birds in Rio Bravo surviving. The breeding pairs in captivity are still viable and reproducing well, though much of the aviaries had to be rebuilt. A great deal of the human infrastructure on the island also had to be rebuilt within the context of what many saw as racism in the way the US government provided aid. More than 1,000 people lost their lives.

The suffering of parrots and people continues on Puerto Rico, and from the same causes. Climate change will mean more and stronger hurricanes and more flooding and loss on the island, and the fractured economy and culture over the centuries continues to strain families, communities, and habitats. What befell the parrots topples the people. The core oppression of domination, which leads to inequality, patriarchy, and white supremacy, gave birth to colonialism, racism, and speciesism that scars the island with environmental injustice.

In an interview, Lisa Paravisini-Gebert, author of the forthcoming book, *The Amazon Parrots of the Caribbean: An Environmental Biography*, said, "We are suffering the consequences of Modernity. Any prosperity we had was not built upon anything real. We are now bankrupt and our living standards are worse than in the 1950's. Colonialism, racism, and extraction is the history of Puerto Rico." She added that colonialism collapses communities, including the native parrot community, which has "lost their culture."

I write this not to assign guilt or shame to those born of privilege, but to encourage us to mourn how a society and economy built upon extraction and domination has hurt us all, and will continue to do so. By mourning and embracing the reality of our shared losses, we can move from being overwhelmed to community solidarity with people and parrots everywhere. There is strength and resilience even in the most fragile heart, community, and population. The recovery of the Puerto Rican parrot and my life is testament to this. Let us not accept a life built upon domination, for anyone, anywhere. Instead we will resist, and love the remnant, even though more storms are brewing over the horizon.

Paravisini-Gerbert finished her interview with me, "We need an economic pattern that doesn't work on continual extraction, which is not good for people or birds. The nation will renew itself." Here is more from one of her lectures:

“Caribbean societies’ resistance to the loss of the remaining parrots is an act of defiance, an effort to preserve what remains of the sacred in their natural habitats, in their contributions to biodiversity, their specific roles in island ecologies, their quirks and idiosyncrasies, their particular beauty and their capacity to make us marvel.”

Saving the Puerto Rican parrot is not just an act of desperation, but also courage and vision that unites people in a unique fashion. For example, during the bleaker 1990’s, in my work as a veterinary consultant, I worked with the project veterinarian. He had hiked out to a wild nest where a chick was sick in her nest. He told me that as he looked in the eyes of the last chick in the last wild nest on Puerto Rico, "I am staring at extinction." I also worked with Jafet Veléz-Valentín, a wildlife biology/aviculturalist for the Iguaca Aviary, formerly the Luquillo Aviary in Puerto Rico. I recently asked Jafet what he thought of the USA’s destruction of Puerto Rico. He responded, "It's water under the bridge. I won't focus on what happened 100 years ago. I need to be part of the people who will work for the progress of this island."

Conservation begins with mourning because the past is riddled with human domination and violence. We have to hold that in our hearts while we also hold the future of a species in our hands. But we don't dwell on the past, we become part of the people working towards progress for the biotic community. Let us join with Jafet and the many others of these lands to be part of the solution for the earth that will renew itself.

**People and Parrots of Puerto Rico:**

**An Example of Intersectional Justice and Core Oppressions**

Though these interconnections are shown in a linear format, actual linkage might be more like a web. In addition terms used are not definite nor does there exist a true consensus on the "isms" and "core oppressions."

**People of Puerto Rico Harmed by:**

- Slavery
- Disease
- Habitat loss and destruction
- Toxic environments
- Climate change
- Hurricanes
- Market Demand/Capitalism

**Underneath this:**

- Racism (individual and institutional)
- Colonialism
- Patriarchy
- Inequality

**Underneath this:**

**Domination mindset**



**Parrots of Puerto Rico Harmed by:**

- Trapping for the wildlife trade
- Disease
- Habitat loss and destruction
- Toxic environments
- Climate change
- Hurricanes
- Market Demand/Capitalism

**Underneath this:**

- Human exceptionalism
- Colonialism
- Patriarchy
- Inequality

**Underneath this:**

**Domination mindset**



## Parrots and People Ravaged by Demand

June 2018

*Once there were brook trout in the streams in the mountains. You could see them standing in the amber current where the white edges of their fins wimpled softly in the flow. They smelled of moss in your hand. Polished and muscular and torsional. On their backs were vermiculate patterns that were maps of the world in its becoming. Maps and mazes. Of a thing which could not be put back. Not be made right again. In the deep glens where they lived all things were older than man and they hummed of mystery. – Cormac McCarthy in “The Road”*

In our parrot conservation project in La Moskitia, Honduras I have been inspired by many, but four extraordinary stand out. Tomás, Rosa, Anayda, and Santiago. They showed outstanding courage to preserve their native lands and way of life, though domestic and international market forces ravage their very lives. Their life stories tie them together and help me resist the core oppression of domination that binds us all.

*Tomás: 2009*

I first heard of La Moskita in 2009 as a place where no one knew what was going on with the parrots in recent years. Héctor was a biologist that had worked in this area for several years and agreed to go with me in 2010 to investigate a possible parrot conservation project there. A few months before the trip he wrote to me about the civil instability following the governmental coup in 2009 and how Tomás Manzanares, an indigenous leader of Rus Rus, had been nearly killed by assassins. Drug traffickers and corrupt government officials were all part of the chaos that allowed invaders to take the land from the indigenes, and Tomás had had enough. He'd reported the names of the land grabbers and illegal loggers to the authorities who did nothing. But the men he reported did do something. Four men waited for him at the river where he took his daily bath, and each shot him. His brother was nearby and scared the men off and called for help. Tomás nearly died of his wounds, but after many surgeries, he lived. “But LoraKim, the danger is still there,” Héctor told me. He continued, “The villagers of Rus Rus where he lived had to flee, and his parents’ home was burned. Other nearby villages have been abandoned and leaders murdered. I hate to tell you this, but I think you should know. We can still cancel the trip.” “It makes me want to go even more,” I replied, especially since it was my government that had endorsed the coup in 2009 to replace the leftist leaning President Zelaya with a more neoliberal, business-oriented government.

I flew to Tegucigalpa, and then took a small plane with Héctor and another biologist, Maria Eugenia Mondragon Hung to Puerto Lempira. There we hired a military escort for the four-hour dirt-road drive to the village of Rus Rus. Tomás accompanied us, against everyone’s advice. It had only been five months since the shooting, he was still in pain, and the area was

dangerous. With Tomás, some forestry officials, four soldiers, Alicia (Tomás' spouse), and our driver, we pulled into Rus Rus in the evening, and had to break open the doors that had been nailed shut to keep out intruders. We slept on floors and in tents, unable to go to the outhouse without a soldier escorting us.

The next morning, we packed into the truck, with pistols bulging from day packs and pockets, and went to Mabita, Alicia's home village. Tomás took us for a walk to the Rus Rus River, where I asked him to share what had happened. He took off his shirt to show us the still-pink scars where bullets had torn his flesh, and where some remained. "Tomás, why are you willing to risk your life to save the parrots?" I asked. "*Doctora*, everything is at risk. I am willing to risk everything. If the parrots don't make it, neither do my people."

It is because of Tomás that I endure front-line conservation.

*Rosa and Anayda: 2012 - 2016*

Rosa came into this world weighing maybe 20 grams, all pink with unruly yellowish down. I, nor any other human, knew her then. I also never met her parents, but I imagine they loved her, and cared for her. They stroked her body with their beaks, pulling at the sheath of her new feathers so they could sprout rainbow and rise over the earth. But then one day men came to her home, broke into it, and pulled Rosa screaming from the warm comfort of the place where she was safe, loved. At least that is one version of her early life. Another telling is that the men hacked into her pine tree and felled it to get to Rosa on the ground. However, she became a prisoner of human desire, she ended up with broken legs and wings. Her parents swooped, calling until they were hoarse, but to no avail. They would never see Rosa again.

Rosa now entered into a dark time. Men bound her in a burlap sack so she wouldn't move and could be easily moved from the fields to the nearby town. She was given little water and heard no longer the sounds and words of comfort that she had known before. No attention was given to her brokenness, even though she cried in pain as she was moved clandestinely from house to house. New men with a different vision for how to meet desire, found her in squalor, fed only corn mush. Her legs were swollen, scabbed over from where the bones had once protruded (see photo above). Tomás Manzanares, he himself with deep scars and bone wounding from those that would take from both indigenous and parrot alike, took care of Rosa, nursing her to some semblance of health, at least enough to grow out her feathers, though dull and damaged with bars of stress that told the story of how her life was full of such loss and sorrow. I saw her pictures from afar and wondered if she would ever fly, let alone live.

Live she did, finding her way to Anayda. Anayda and her spouse Santiago, and other villagers, had been taking in rescued scarlet macaws and yellow-naped parrots for the past 2.5 years in the village of Mabita in La Moskitia, Honduras. Rosa joined this liberated flock, though she had to be hand carried from branch to feeding platform to porch. I met her when she was nearly 18 months old, a sad and pain-ridden being. She cried constantly, her lungs were

congested, she was desperately thin, her ears leaked fluid from a mite infestation, and her legs were bowed out – one side from a break, the other, dislocated at the hip. She could not extend her wings either, both with internal tissues scarred and joints contracted, evidence of the early fractures that had not been tended to or allowed a chance to heal. I thought she would die and said so to Anayda. “Without you, Rosa will not live.” Anayda heard that as a charge and did not let Rosa die. She continued the treatments I began, and never let Rosa out of her sight. When she went to Nicaragua to tend fields, Rosa rode in her shirt, both of them behind Santiago on a motorcycle.

I next saw Rosa when she was two, and she was a fine thing. Still fearfully thin, she had regained her health, her feathers had grown in shiny and shockingly red, the disease gone and replaced with some feistiness. By three she was attempting short flights, abrupt in their landing but able to get her closer to her companion Anayda, and the other macaws. Macaws, being macaws, would often pick on her, but some were her friends, such as Lempira who preened her feathers and kept her company at night. Then Lempira healed enough to fly, so he would go off with all the other macaws, leaving Rosa often alone in Casa Ara. That didn't stop Rosa from engaging in the world, using her beak for balance and to walk, taking hobbling steps with her bowed legs and curled feet to get to food and to companionship.

I got to spend two months with her near her 4th birthday. I wondered about her future, all broken, so un-macaw-like with her diminished ability (earth please forgive me for such thoughts). I am a hobbler too, legs in declining function, so it is perhaps really myself whom I judge for being less than my species can be. I watched Rosa closely, and found a fierce friend, for she taught me that even the broken can yet shine and serve.

Just past her 4th birthday Mocerón came to the Rescue Center. He was a weak thing, timid and beaten down with captivity. We were afraid to introduce him into Casa Ara, knowing there could be fights. But Anayda said, “Rosa will take care of him. That is what she does with newcomers.” It took all of 5 minutes before Rosa zeroed in on him. Beak advancing to grab wood or wire, she pulled herself slowly towards him. Within ten minutes they were preening each other, hardly thereafter ever leaving each other's side, Mocerón safe now in the company and protection of Rosa.

Some visitors from the USA came to the village one day and stopped at Casa Ara. They had been led to believe that the birds could be handled and only one was “brave” enough to grab a macaw, the only one he could get, Rosa. I saw this from afar and ran running, “No toca las guaras, no toca Rosa.” *Don't touch the macaws, don't touch Rosa.* Why is it that humans must always touch and keep beauty close, harming as they go? When will we ever realize that we live in eternity's sunrise when beauty flies free? For when others live in freedom, so do we, for their liberation is ours and is their beauty.

I got a call from Santiago a few weeks ago. “Doctora, algo triste. Rosa murió.” Dr., something sad, Rosa died. She had developed a cough and was taken into Anayda’s home. There was no clinic, no veterinarian, inadequate medicine, and no diagnostic ability to know why she was so sick. She died two days later. I didn’t feel much then, couldn’t, because I had to work with Santiago on understanding the illness she had and who else might have it. Santiago did the hard chore of performing a necropsy, cutting up little Rosa so her tissues could tell us something of the mysterious illness that threatens the liberated flock.

So, Rosa is in bits and pieces, and only now, can I let myself break into pieces. I just couldn’t write about her any earlier, I couldn’t risk feeling. Now on the way to Paraguay to yet another country where macaws are trashed and broken for the illegal wildlife trade, on the long plane trip I saw the movie, “Me, Before You.” It is about a woman who tries to love a paraplegic enough so that he would not choose to die. She failed, but she gave him good company and love before he left his life of pain. They were both changed completely in knowing each other, despite their initial and ongoing wounding.

Our love and care weren’t enough for Rosa. We all have failed her, and her kind. But Rosa didn’t falter. She lived in pain and with her unique and precious life; she gave us and the macaws companionship. She taught us the kind of love that tasks us to bone deep rending and mending that never ceases. I wish my love was enough so that Rosa would not have died. But I do not have the power to end pain, anyone’s. And that hurts all the more.

I’d like to go back to the days before I met Rosa, when I wasn’t responsible for all those crippled and tortured birds in the illegal wildlife trade in Honduras. I have no idea what I am doing, or how to go forward, living in love, beauty, and pain, but I don’t suppose Rosa did either. But she shone and she served. Who are we to attempt anything less than that? Anayda once told me something similar when I asked her why she dedicates her life to caring for macaws. “Once I saw Rosa, I could not let it happen anymore.”

I can't let it happen anymore either. So dear Rosa, I promise you now my unending love. May I not forget that though you are now gone, you are still visible and ever with me. Your beauty flies behind me, around me, under and above me, and in front of me. You live into the future in those who knew you, and I dream beyond knowing, that your parents flew over the Rescue Center in your last days and recognized your voice, calling out their love to you.

Rosa, Pree Palisa (Miskito for Rosa, Fly Free). Your beauty will never die.

And you humans, *no toca!* Let them fly free.

*Santiago - 2018*

Tomás drives me to Mabita from Pt. Lempira, grasping his scarred arms whenever we take a break on the 3-hour drive along a gully-ridden dirt road. He asks if I have any pain

medication and I smile, for this time I have remembered to bring an entire bottle of acetaminophen. I withhold some for me and others in the project, and hand him the bottle. He smiles back at me, showing his missing teeth. Getting closer to him over the years working together, he finally told me the story of how he lost the teeth. He had been climbing a tree, to poach some macaw chicks, and fell, knocking his head against the trunk on his way down.

I have also gotten to know Santiago better, who has become our Project Coordinator in Mabita. We could not do this project without him, for he has a passion and ability to help his people and the parrots, knowing that the welfare of both are tied up into protecting their lands from outside forces, which are also linked to inside forces. Feeling more comfortable with me perhaps, he admits how his fellow-villagers still threaten to poach parrots and how he once was a poacher. I smile at him and say, "We all are poachers," meaning, as I have explained to him, that we all are oppressors and oppressed caught up in an economic and social system that chews up and spits out people and beings.

This year Santiago tells me more of the story of what has happened here in the area. He said once the scarlet macaws were as numerous as the common red-lored amazon and that there were many more and much larger pine trees in the village territory. But then came the 1980's when the demand for parrots from the USA meant that his people now had a means to have cash to buy necessities, as normally they lived off of what they farmed, fished, and hunted. The villagers were motivated to take all the macaws they could, and if they couldn't climb a tree, they cut or burned them down. He said the trees and macaws were coming back, but it would take a long time yet, for though the USA and Europe aren't buying parrots as much because it has become illegal to both export and import them, people from other countries are now the buyers who are part of the pervasive illegal wildlife trade.

Santiago explains, "So much was lost in the 1980's for it was the time of the Nicaragua Civil War. Refugees came by the hundreds to live here and they too took all the wildlife. There were no fish, no birds, and the trees were coming down." I grimace and don't say anything, because he already knows what I will say. My country that was the origin of the parrot trade here, also fueled the war to suppress the leftist leading government of Nicaragua that had taken control from the US backed dictator, Somosa. I was caught in a web of harm due to my country of origin, as was Santiago, his people, and parrots.

It is not just my country that is involved in this web. Governments and corporations from other nations are vying for extraction as well. As I accompany Santiago to local villages to set up our patrols for the season, we hear report after report of how some Chinese men are boating up and down the Coco River that separates Nicaragua from Honduras, offering to buy eggs and young toucans, yellow-naped amazon chicks, and macaws. I tell Santiago that Chinese buyers are also buying in the areas of my other projects, such as Nicaragua and Paraguay. In the area we have monitored in Concepción, Paraguay, there are no nests of macaws as they are all taken, mostly by a buyer who was caught in 2016 with a suitcase full of young chicks and parrot eggs

in an airport in Spain. "The whole world wants your birds, Santiago," I grumbled. A few days later we both are meeting with the leaders of another village, and he tells them of the Chinese, causing several men to exclaim that it isn't fair that wealthy internationals are taking their resources and birds to get rich, while leaving them poor and parrot-less.

The USA being so close, though, probably has caused the most harm. Just this year the USA failed to assert human rights in Honduras. They recognized the election of President Juan Orlando Hernández, which is widely seen as constitutionally illegal and fraudulent. People died protesting that, but to no avail. I do not wish this for Santiago or any of our rangers; he has received death threats for his attempts to reduce poaching in the area. We have greatly expanded our patrols, and the few families that poach extensively are pushing back. Just this week of June 11, 2018, three armed men came into Mabita and confronted Anayda, telling her "cuidado" (be careful). Tomás went chasing after them with an empty shotgun (shells are expensive he explains to me), but couldn't discover who they were and what they wanted. We do know that confirmed poachers walk the lands, intimidating the people who are running the local parrot conservation project.

Santiago doesn't always report people who take the birds and gives them another chance. I asked him why, and he said, "It is dangerous. They say they will kill me." "But if you don't turn them in, they will keep doing it. How do you reconcile that?" I asked him. "Well, I tell them that the first time I pardon them, but the second time they do it, I turn them in." I remark that he could still be harmed, and he then told me the story of how when Tomás had been attacked, he led the group into the forest to track down the shooters. One of them incriminated in the attempted murder of Tomás shot at Santiago, but missed. Another time the same man confronted Santiago at point blank range, but the gun jammed. The shooter said, "Oh, I give up," and Santiago survived. With a humble grin Santiago said, "Maybe I can't be killed."

I don't buy that for a minute. Honduras is one of the most dangerous countries in the world for environmentalists and parrots are the most endangered groups of all birds. Their existence is a fragile thing, though their courage is not. May these strands of their lives so entwine you and weave us all into a community of resistance, resilience, and solidarity.

## Needs of Poachers and Conservationists

May 2017

It began in 2014 when a man died climbing a scarlet macaw nest in the Moskitia region of Honduras, and I beheld the grieving family and village members as they wept beneath the tree from which he had fallen. Seeing their love and memory of this man naked before me, it opened up a deeper understanding of the ways of poachers. The poacher's surviving family came to me with the remaining macaw nestling (one had died at the base of the tree with the man) and asked me to examine the chick and make recommendations for its health. I did this despite knowing that the bird was doomed to captivity and the illegal wildlife trade. That year I visited several village homes where parrots lived that had been snatched from the wild. I spoke with these people, who loved their birds, though they did not treat them very well, due to ignorance and cultural traditions.

In the following years more and more villages have stopped poaching parrots and more and more of them have confessed to me that they were once robbers of nests. These are the same people who are working with me for the conservation of their endangered scarlet and great green macaws, and yellow-naped amazons. Some tell me that they don't need to take a nest or two every year because they receive stipends for their conservation work as nest and population monitors and rangers. The son of the man who died told me that working for conservation "allows me to love the birds."

Now it is 2017 and I find less and less difference between myself and poachers. Yes, some poachers and their extended poaching families are poaching as a business, hardened to the needs of the parrots and other wildlife, and to their own village community who asks them to desist, but they won't. One family can literally take out hundreds of endangered parrots in an area in a year, causing much damage. But people do not poach just for monetary gain. There are a host of other needs they meet when they tear apart avian families, and sometimes burn or chop down trees to gain access to the towering nests.

Understanding their needs helps us have choice on how to connect with them and develop conservation strategies that have greater chances of success as we seek to value the needs of all involved. Understanding the needs of others helps us understand and accept not just ourselves, but all of humanity. We need this understanding and acceptance for the long haul of nurturing ourselves and all of nature.

People who poach are also meeting their needs for:

Respect – climbing trees is a difficult and dangerous task, and the climbers are admired. They also gain respect from their families who appreciate the income.

Meaning – poachers are making a living, or supplementing their living, and find meaning and purpose in the goals of hunting wildlife. In some instances, they are carrying on a multigenerational family tradition, as well as thousands of years of a culture that has always had parrots and their feathers in trade, as well as in the cooking pot and adorning their clothes and headdresses.

Flow – poachers spend a lot of time attuned to wildlife and nature as a whole, and such a focus allows one to flow with the pursuit of doing something you are good at, and which has meaning. Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi defined flow as the "state of concentration or complete absorption with the activity at hand and the situation. It is a state in which people are so involved in an activity that nothing else seems to matter."

Kinesthetic joy – using one's body to move through the forests and savannas, often hiking many miles in one day, climbing trees, and sometimes running from rangers brings one into full use of one's body and interacting with the world

Connection – trading in wildlife gives you something to talk about and a way to connect with prospective buyers and other poachers. Some, but not all poachers, also connect, if not consciously then in an embodied way, to the birds they must handle and feed. It is not often an empathetic connection that considers the needs of the animal, but it a connection none-the-less. Touching, listening to, talking to and feeding these birds is all part of the connecting experience.

Nurture - though poachers do not always nurture their birds, they must feed them, which meets the need to nurture. They realize that the people who will take care of the young birds – their families at home, potential buyers, or others to whom they gift a bird – will also enjoy caring for the bird. They are also nurturing their family by having an income.

Beauty – there is nothing like a flying scarlet macaw, whose long tail contains rainbow colors beyond reckoning. How can there be that much beauty in one bird? The poachers, I believe, are hunters of beauty made incarnate in flesh.

Stimulation, fun, entertainment – there is a thrill to hunting and interacting with the unknown and mysterious world of wildlife.

Contribution and efficiency – poachers earn income for their family and are pleased with how many birds they can take in a season.

Looking over this list of needs I see that it is not so very different from those of bird owners, veterinarians, and conservationists. The pursuit of wildlife, either to protect or to ravage, meets similar universal needs that exist in all of us.

So, it should have been of no surprise to me when one of the local firefighters told me of a low nest that is easily climbable, which they did, and how he and the other wildfire patrollers commented that they wanted to take the birds and have them in their home, I exclaimed, “So do I!” (and quickly added that I could not because it is not good for the birds). Someone did end up taking those chicks a few weeks later, and I mourn for them, and for all of us. For when I see pictures of chicks in nests, especially young yellow-naped amazons, I find myself wanting to hold them and have them around, all the time, and that desire has dangerous consequences.

Understanding our needs and the strategies we take to meet these needs, as conservationist or poacher, helps us move on to choices where neither's needs trump the other, nor the birds with which we are so strongly entwined. Maybe there are other ways we can meet these needs in people, that might mitigate their desire to poach, such as training them as conservationists, that might also mitigate their desire to poach. With different options, they and we can choose liberation, for ourselves and for the parrots we covet.

## Forced Migration

El Paso, Texas 2004

Today I saw winging towards me over the desert landscape on the edge of El Paso two Red-Crowned Amazons, approximately one thousand miles from their native land. For every two amazons that escape and survive, I know many hundreds of thousands do not survive the trip after being poached from nest cavities in the wilds of their homeland.

Today I know that here in the U.S. Southwest, if this is an average summer day, two undocumented immigrants will die in the desert landscape, probably well over one thousand miles from their native land. For every two immigrants dying on U.S. soil, I know many millions attempted to make the trip, with no other choice before them, from some *pueblo* or *ciudad* wild with the chaos of their homeland.

Today, I go to the Southwest Key House to provide religious services to the Central American minors who have been detained here. None of them do not have the proper documents to allow them to stay in the country and all of them have difficult lives and harrowing stories to tell. I strum along on my electric bass while one 17 year-old from Honduras accompanies me on guitar. After the service he tells me, "Hermana, I cannot go home. I will die. I nearly died in the desert and this suffering cannot have been for nothing."

Both human and bird are beautiful wonders uprooted from their cultural and ecological niches. While no being escapes change and death, I know this level of suffering and dying does not have to be. Poachers' dark patios, quarantine stations of old, pet stores, and breeding facilities have been the graveyards for millions of birds. The ground on which I walk feels like a graveyard for those humans fleeing economic oppression, family abuse, and injustice. Over 300 immigrants will die this year here in the Southwest deserts, and in the El Paso sector alone approximately 100,000 will be repatriated back to their countries. Repatriation today emerges from the wounds of colonization and unfair global economic practices begun centuries before. Returning people to suffering and hopelessness does not stem the flood of humanity vying for a better life. We also repatriate parrots. Reintroduction, as we call it, today emerges from the wounds of the global pet parrot trade that entrenched parrot poaching in Latin America in the last fifty years. Returning parrots to the wild often seems hopeless and by itself does not stem the flood of avian suffering.

The parallels between these two species of immigrants raise interconnecting justice issues involving birds and people. Both species suffer from the forces that produced the multi-species massive migration northward and that devastated the habitats from which they each hearken. Colonization of the New World and the subsequent burgeoning global trade left many native peoples landless, their cultures abruptly interrupted, their populations decimated, and their sustainable agriculture replaced by a new economic system that used entire nations of people to export products. To feed their families and meet the rising costs of goods, food, and health care

in their country, adults and children alike are left with little option but to work for low wages under farm and industrial systems. Over and over, the profits of a few trump the flourishing of many. Families, unable to sustain themselves, are torn apart as parents seek work in the cities or in other countries so that they can send money home. And not only parents. More and more children are attempting the perilous trip to the U.S. from Central and South America, alone – looking for parents, looking for work, looking for hope. Some are successful. Others end up maimed from hopping trains, or brutalized, robbed, or raped by adults along the migratory path. They have lost their chance to finish their childhood normally within a nourishing and stable family and culture. Young parrots too lose their chance to mature normally within the nourishing complex environment of native habitats and stable flocks.

In the Central American and Caribbean countries in which I have lived and worked, there is a desperation in the people. Of course people will poach parrots, burn trees, and attempt illegal entry into the US. They have scant other choice. Landowners and agribusinesses, also desperate (for profit), clear large sections of land for intensive monoculture crops for export. Monoculture destroys the land there just as it did here, where our countryside has lost its biodiversity and lost its own native parrot species, the Carolina Parakeet.<sup>7</sup> This is the march of ecological disintegration that arises when the hope of the good life is also the destroyer of the good life.

I believe the core of the problem lies in the wounded, fearful human heart in search of interconnection, love, and beauty. While many good people have sacrificed much to protect the varied, rich, and complex life that evolution weaves into a glorious whole, too often we aren't getting at this root issue. Out of fear, we enforce our national borders, work so hard to control migration, keep working classes powerless here and abroad, protect our giant virtual gated community, and restrict the oppressed in Latin America to a giant virtual cage for our benefit. We also now enforce our national borders to disallow wild caught birds from being sold or transported here. While our captive breeding and agriculture efforts have been tremendous, powerless parrots of Latin America are still kept in cages for human benefit. Our fear and need responses are not always our most compassionate or healing ones.

I realize that I am simplifying complex issues. Colonization, globalization, and pet parrots have also brought good to humanity, and genuine happiness to some households. But the cost has been high. We can and must do a better job of balancing competing claims. We can liberate the parrots, and the oppressed people of Latin America – and, indeed, ourselves. Complicity in, and denial of, the injustices around the world leads to guilt, shame, brokenness, and depression. It is not easy to witness the suffering of caged life, no matter the species, and to know that somehow, even if we don't see ourselves directly contributing to suffering, we are plagued by what we might or should do. By liberating others, we become liberated, and return wholesome joy to our lives.

The return to joy and health lies in reducing and changing our consumer choices, in voting, in political activism aimed locally and abroad, and in sharing, learning and witnessing. Perhaps most importantly, the journey to wholeness lies in listening to, loving, and being open to the beauty of those with whom we share our lives, communities, and habitats. Join with other voices of all species calling to one another from jungle to desert, from city to *aldea*, and from heart to heart. Let us walk together and share this difficult task, for there is no easy path to freedom. We do this so that our desert walks need not be scarred with death and dying and so that we might always know the thrill of winged, chattering hope, flying above us and leading us toward peace.

*Update 2018*

Yency, that 17-year-old young man in El Paso, came home to live with my husband and I in 2004. He made a claim for asylum, and was granted it. We became his sponsors and managing conservators, meaning that he had a path to legal residency, which he took. With barely six years of elementary school, he took a year of college English, multiple remedial classes at a local community college, attempted to pass the GED until he was finally successful on his sixth attempt, put himself through a 4-year college degree, became a US citizen, was hired as a police officer in Charlotte, NC, married, and gave us our first granddaughter. He called us "Ma" and "Pa" the first week he came to our home, but we never imagined that he and his would become such dear family to us.

I had started to work in Honduras in 2010, long after Yency became our son. Because of him, in part, I felt a strong connection to the people and parrots there. My work there was as a wildlife veterinarian and conservationist, with my ministry more as a stealth maneuver. Often I would call people together for conversation, gratitudes, and sometimes prayer. The first morning of our 2011 season in La Moskitia, Honduras in the village of Mabita, the villagers gathered around in a circle, prompted in part by me and also because of their cultural heritage of discussing things as a community. This being a Catholic village and the leaders being lay pastors, the prayers began around the circle in the middle of the village. When it came my turn, I recited my favorite poem, "Wild Geese" by Mary Oliver. As they didn't have geese in Mabita I substituted macaws for geese (please forgive me, Mary). I spoke in English, and then it was translated into Spanish, and then into Miskito.

I spoke of how one doesn't have to be good, or ravage oneself with repentance, but that, as Mary Oliver said, "You only have to let the soft animal of your body love what it loves." We each have despair to share with one another, and while we do that, the world doesn't stop for us. Storm and rainclouds move over the savannahs, the deep pines, the jungles, and the bean fields. Macaws, high over the trees, go home to their nests.

As I was reciting, we heard the calls of macaws, five of them, which is a rare sighting when most chicks never fly free because of poachers. They flew towards us as I continued the poem,

saying how we each have loneliness, but a world of beauty is offered to us, given to us by the macaws whose harsh calls tell us repeatedly how we all belong in the “family of things.”

At that point, the birds were directly overhead. We wept, those of us of many nations and ethnicities. The birds told us we belong, and in that knowing we committed ourselves to the life around us, and in us. Such beauty, belonging, and commitment encourages ordinary people to do extraordinary things. Maybe we can't choose our biological family, but we can choose to welcome all, migrants of every species, into the family of life.

## **My Caged Sister and Her Parrots**

July 2017

She was three years older than me, the first of four children born to a southern preacher's kid and an Iowan farm girl. My grandmother once hinted obliquely at my sister's childhood, of how badly she was treated by our parents. True, none of us escaped the dysfunction heaped upon my parents by those that came before them, but I suspect Lisa got the brunt of it. Yet in all the pictures as a child, she is the smiling one. The rest of us had some smiles, but they seem guarded, careful, brooding. Not hers, as she loved being in pictures, taking pictures, remembering family times. She collected memories.

When we were both in our fifties I would marvel how she could hold forth on what happened when and to whom in our childhood and young adulthood. Whereas I left for California the day after high school graduation, throwing out one thing after another to make the subsequent moves easier, including memories of a stressful childhood, she held tight to everything, and I mean everything. I'd be hard pressed to say whether she threw away anything, ever. Maybe those that collect do so in part because each item is attached to a memory, to love, to connection. If the article disappears, so might the relationships or the collector themselves.

One of the hardest things for her to let go of was the beauty of birds. To keep that beauty close, she got her first parrot when she was in her 20's. Skipper was a yellow crowned parrot, and as a young bird it bonded fiercely with Lisa. Lisa would not be parted from the bird, so that when she came home to visit during the holidays, she brought Skipper. When Lisa's myriad illnesses began to manifest in her 30's, she could no longer drive a car or risk taking an airplane. I suspect she was having panic attacks and perhaps suffered from acrophobia. So, I would come get her for vacations, packing her and her many bags into my van, along with Skipper. Skipper was easy to travel with because his cage was small. This was not just his traveling cage, but his permanent cage. As an avian veterinarian I coached her on how to improve the well-being of her parrot, and she tried, but the bird never knew the expansiveness of a well lived life. In the latter half of Skipper's life, Lisa couldn't really even let him out of the cage because his wild hormones led him to attack and bite her.

Lisa became sicker and sicker, so that she couldn't even travel by car for long distances. So, I would come see her, often bringing my own parrot, Exodor, in his cage. Because her apartment had gotten too cluttered for company, she and Skipper would join Exodor and me in a hotel room near where she lived. Trying not to trip I would weave myself between stacks of books, bags, videos, food, and magazines as I headed to the kitchen to retrieve Skipper, whose now small cage was on the floor. There was no longer room on the counters or table for him, and really not a whole lot of room for him to move around in his cage. To ease my profound discomfort at seeing the living conditions of both, I would breathe deep, literally and

metaphorically, because the bird dander and dust was thick in her apartment, threatening all of our health.

As Lisa got sicker, so did Skipper. On the day he died, Lisa was heartbroken, and wanted to die as well. She had shared before that she didn't see the point of living, and that it was Skipper that kept her going. Though I hated to see her in pain, part of me was relieved because any caged bird meant to fly and live in socially complex flocks leaves me deeply saddened, and especially in the case of Skipper whose life was restricted more and more with the ever-narrowing life of my sister and her home. My sadness for Lisa however went unabated though I tried many strategies so that she could see the beauty in herself and heal.

A few years later Lisa telephoned to tell me that she had another parrot – this time a blue-fronted amazon. “But Lisa, you are so sick, how can you take care of a bird, let alone yourself?” “I just have to have something to live for, I am so miserable.” She was miserable – anxious, depressed, ill, and I feared for both her and her bird.

I would keep on visiting her every year because she could not travel, and every year the collectibles and debris in her home reached higher and deeper. There was only a narrow pathway to the kitchen and one up the stairs to the bathroom. Lodged in the midst of all the cloying web of “stuff” was also the parrot in her small cage. By now the kitchen stuff had piled up over the windows so the bird could only look in one direction, towards the refrigerator. Lisa too was trapped in the kitchen, as all beds and sofas served as receptacles for her memory laden objects. It was only after I helped her move did I realize that she too had been sleeping in the kitchen, wedged in an easy chair in the kitchen, sharing with the bird a caged existence.

There came a day when Lisa was diagnosed with a knowable disease, breast cancer. She was not to escape it. As she went through rounds of metastasis and treatment, her parrot too was winding down, though relatively young for a parrot. Birdles died in August 2013 and by November, Lisa moved in with us for her clock's spring was loosening as well. I had helped Lisa bury both her parrots, and a number of parakeets, in her backyard, so it was hard for me too to leave behind her home in the Virginia mountains. I had loved her birds, though I was glad they were gone. The relief was palpable that I would not have to care for Lisa's bird as well. There would be no more immediate reminder of birds in inadequate housing situations to cause both her and me distress. She never wanted this for her birds, or for herself.

Lisa moved into our dining room, in a large house known as the Parsonage. It was the housing supplied by the church my spouse served up on the hill on an eight-acre wooded lot. Lisa was in the dining room because she could not navigate stairs, and because we could shut the doors to give her privacy, but we hardly ever did. She loved the large spaces and the wide windows throughout her level, for it was like living in a tree house. And there were birds. I had long left behind keeping pet parrots, since I was now a wildlife veterinarian working mostly with endangered parrots in Latin America. They were in trouble there because of the illegal wildlife

trade, and because of people like my sister and me who wanted birds close to us. But I had never left the deep wanting of having intimate relationships with birds. So, when she came, I invited birds not into the home, but all around. On every window possible I hung various kinds of bird feeders, and also along the porches. In the dining room she had three feeders that she could see from her bed, and if she sat up, not always an easy maneuver, she could see several more in the living room, and even more in the study and den. We talked birds all day long, joined up to count birds as part of a citizen scientist project, and watched in silence as feathers fluttered within feet of us. Always, the thump of birds hitting the feeders or branches all around us reminded us of the beautiful, wondrous family of life. In her last months, birds were always with her, and they were flying free.

I like to think that Lisa too experienced some liberation in her ending days. She had ample room to move, to see, to wonder, and as much space to be herself as I could give her. It wasn't easy – she was in physical pain, she was protective, distant, careful, anxious, and often I could not follow her logic on how she made decisions in her life. I was a “thrower out” of things, and when she came to live with us, she brought her stuff, and I mean her emotional stuff as well, and it became mine too, for we were molded by the same forces and society that throws away people and parrots.

While with us, she had many scares and emergency doctor and hospital visits, fitting the pattern if one so chooses to categorize, which I hesitate to do, of being not just a “hoarder” but a “hypochondriac.” This time, though, the illness was very real, and she would not be able to hold on to anything much longer. Eventually her condition destabilized to the point when we knew she could not come back home from her last hospital stay. I wondered how I could bring love, care, and birds to her in a nursing home, but never had to make that decision as she took a sudden turn for the worse. She slipped into unconsciousness after her last words had been “it’s my fault,” referring to trying to get out of bed without assistance and falling a few days before. In her last hours, I had music playing in the hospital, and placed flowers and feathers in her curled, nonresponsive hands. I prayed that she could feel the love, and experience liberation from a life of pain. I don’t know if she ever did, even when she was younger. Life imprisoned her as it did her birds, and her last words might have nearly been her first as well. Fear and shame were her constant companions. If she could have let them go, oh how she would have soared!

Lisa lived her own unique pain and beauty, though it is also ours. What causes others in Latin America to trap birds, traps us here as well. We live under the illusion that domination is the only way to be a winner, and that there must always be losers, feathered or otherwise. It is someone’s fault, and they must pay. We spend our days with cloudy perceptions of reality, imprisoning ourselves with a false sense of separation from life. We order our days to control our safety and well-being, fearing that if we don’t cage and define beauty, then it will escape us, and we will disappear. When I am around people with parrots in their home, many of them say they feel guilty for having one, and so bird people, like all of us, accept living with fear and shame, and a smaller world than it need be.

From working as a parrot conservationist and living in war-torn Guatemala during their civil war, I first experienced what captivity means for oppressed and marginalized people without privilege and power. It hasn't changed much in the 31 years I have worked in front-line conservation. Parrots and people are still torn from their families. This harm originates from the same root causes that have led to the massive trade in wild parrots that is decimating the populations throughout the world, and that cloisters the human heart in dark, dusty apartments. We are chained to a domination mentality that fosters inequality and multiple oppressions that intersected in multiple ways with my sister and her parrots - ageism, ableism, speciesism, patriarchy, and classicism, among others.

Lisa's life is a story of tragedy, and also of beauty, for both are interwoven in all our lives and in existence. We can't have one without the other. She taught me that, as do poached parrots. Beauty is before us, above us, behind us, and below us. We walk in beauty, as well as tragedy. Every day I am in the field in some distant locale in Latin America, I hear or experience some story of loss and it feels like a kick in the gut, reminding me that we are attempting the impossible – to love human nature so deeply that we will uncage our fears and fly free.

Let us do this, before the parrots, and other beings on this planet disappear. Or as they say in Latin American, “desparecido,” (disappeared). Life on this planet is being disappeared, by us, because we collect other beings to guard against our own dissolution. If only we would realize that ultimately, we cannot disappear because we are always connected in beauty and worth, to everything. There is nothing to collect; there is nothing to throw away.

But there is plenty to let go of.

*They who bind to themselves a joy*

*Do the winged life destroy*

*But they who kiss the joy as it flies,*

*Live in eternity's sunrise*

- Adapted from William Blake

## Reflections and Responses to the Intersections

*Antiracism work will require a liberation that we may not have initially expected- liberation from the human-animal divide, and, as a result, severing the connection between animality and "non-status." I'll also say that, given my view, I'm taking the position that the best case in favor of defending animals from violation is going to be generated from within the antiracism commitment. Unlike others, I don't see these as competing commitments and, in fact, I think that these issues must be addressed together.*

- Syl Ko<sup>6</sup>

## **Missions, Conservation, and Native Peoples: Conquering In The Quest for Utopia**

December 1998

### **Confession (2018)**

The following text is part of a paper I submitted while attending Vanderbilt Divinity School in Nashville, Tennessee. I attended this university so I could gain the tools to navigate the complex and challenging world of conservation. I had just moved back from war-torn Guatemala, carrying with me a fair amount of remorse and guilt that I could not "tough it out" and remain in this violent country during the civil war. I could return to a peaceful land, while the parrots and people of Guatemala could not.

Moving back to my country of origin I now saw the violence inherent here and everywhere. Peace for me remained elusive as it does for so many. I was haunted simultaneously by both the power of my influence and the feebleness of my helpful impact on the people and parrots that I had come to love. To process whether I could, or should return to front-line conservation, I undertook research to see how conservationists and missionaries compared to each other in how they both harmed and benefited a culture not their own, and the beings that lived in these biotic communities.

The result was a lengthy and frequently footnoted paper, which highlights the beginnings of my discernment of how to be in the world with the burden of privilege and inevitable collusion with colonizing and dominating forces. I humbly submit these words as a testament to those early years in conservation where I was beset with both ignorance and innocence, while also besotted with the beauty of people and parrots of these lands. They remind me of how oppression has not been deconstructed yet in my work or in conservation as a whole,<sup>8</sup> and how we must continue to strive to return the power to the indigenous in whose hands studies<sup>9</sup> are finding the more effective conservationists.

*(The full text and references are available upon request)*

### **Introduction**

Missionaries come and go, leaving behind an ambiguous and conflicting legacy. Similar in methods, challenges, motives, personality, politics, successes, and failures, the conservation movement may affect native peoples in a disturbingly parallel fashion. Social theories on cultural contact can highlight how the processes of conservation follow analogous processes of cultural change and individual abuse that occurred during the initial and ongoing phases of European colonization and missionary efforts. Studying the comparable patterns between missionaries and conservationists produces possible answers to the question of whether conservationists should go to foreign countries, and if they do, under what circumstances they should work.

To illustrate these points, an in depth comparison between three conservationists, Dian Fossey<sup>10,11</sup> (mountain gorillas), Ann LaBastille<sup>12</sup> (Atilán grebe), and LoraKim Joyner<sup>13</sup> (parrots), and selected historical and ethnographic texts will be presented. It must be kept in mind that these are but three conservation programs, originating from and contacting a myriad of cultural influences. They cannot even begin to represent the multiplicity of possible interactions between conservationists and native peoples. Instead they can help illuminate possible factors, questions, and solutions regarding the complex interactions between those wishing to bring Utopia to others and their targeted groups.

### **Possible Impact**

The long and ongoing history of missions have laid bare their impacts on native peoples. This discussion, by laying out the similarities between missions and conservation and listing possible results of their work and presence, suggests that conservationists similarly impact native peoples. Seeing the harm done to native cultures and individuals by missionaries, the question needs to be asked how and if the relatively small numbers of foreign conservationists can negatively impact cultures, local populations, or even individuals. Perhaps the even more important question to ask, as is asked of missionaries, is how much benefit is given to native people in light of the possible harm that can be and is done. The proceeding discussion led up to these questions, which now can be addressed by considering first how cultures and individuals can be changed by contact with foreign peoples. In other words, can conservationists, given their small numbers and the already overwhelming Westernization process occurring in native cultures, have any additional significant effect on natives?

To answer this question, let alone to discuss it, requires sociology training and indeed, even after a life time of research it might prove impossible to untangle the affects of conservationists form the overall Westernization process, much as it is difficult to weed out the missionary factor from imperialism. Briefly investigating the theories behind the acculturation that missionaries were involved with, can add insight on how to answer the proceeding question and at the very least, might raise awareness about the conservation process.

Changes will occur in cultures if there is anything more than just superficial contact (Linton 1940). Conservationists definitely had intimate and prolonged contact with natives (Fossey, Joyner, LaBastille). Changes will also occur in cultures when old ways are not meeting the needs of survival. For Fossey and LaBastille the natives were able to survive with their old culture, and the idea of conserving their wildlife did not impact their immediate or even foreseeable survival. Joyner's situation in Guatemala was a bit more extreme, and although the natives were surviving, there were serious socio-economic and political circumstances that made many live dangerously close to disaster. Given that the conservation message does not improve chances of survival of people in any of these cases, it may help explain why conservation is not easily or likely adopted by people. As conversion will only occur if the change is worth the effort, it is doubly difficult for native people to engage in conservation if it will cause them to

change their traditional ways without any foreseeable benefit. Usually Western innovations are more complicated, and natives will not take on more complex elements unless it gives them better control of their environment. For instance, the complex system of recycling is very time consuming, does not offer immediate benefit to peasants, and does not help them interact any better with their environment. Hence, recycling efforts were only briefly attempted in Guatemala (Joyner).

Changes first occur not only when new ideas are expected to be advantageous, but also when they can add prestige to the convert (Linton). Inclusion into conservation programs with uniforms, high technology equipment, better salary, and proximity to "successful" Americans drew in very loyal converts (Fossey, Joyner, LaBastille). If the conservationists are particularly admired, converts will even take on ideas or practices that are inconvenient. If they are not, converts will only take on useful ideas. For instance, the poachers in Guatemala remained hostile to Joyner the entire time and only adopted her new innovations in tree climbing (to get at parrot chicks), but refused to incorporate any conservation techniques.

Dissemination from converts to others will only occur if the convert is admired or influential, which is complicated in many societies as the amount of competition for resources and the extreme socio-economic imbalance makes for strained interpersonal relationships (Joyner, LaBastille). Further advancement of conservation ideas will not progress at all if those in power will be put at a disadvantage with the changes. Poachers, governmental officials, and wealthy landowners were unable to accept necessary conservation methods as it would have compromised their income, power and stability (Fossey, Joyner). Total replacement of old ways with conservation ideas can probably never occur because conservation cannot meet all the old needs, nor help maintain the previous economic status. Restricting natural resources will diminish the income of poachers and landowners. Ultimately, cultural values, such as conservation, are very difficult to transplant (Fraise). What occurs is the transplantation of institutions that take on combined cultural values, resulting in conservation organizations that operate under the domineering principles of Western imperialism corrupted even further with aspects of the conquered fractured society (Fossey, Joyner).

Further complications make acceptance of the conservation message difficult. People from the donor group are not always admired. To many, the presence of conservationists only reminded them of a long history of repression. Interestingly, warfare or being conquered does not necessarily limit cultural borrowing, unless of course the conquerors are despised (Fossey, Joyner, LaBastille). Transfer between cultures is less likely to occur when the conquered remain hostile with no hope for revolt. In these cases, the recipient cultures will only accept new elements that are needed for existence, which is not conservation (Joyner). All the conservationists resorted to force or punishment to protect the wildlife, which leads to further resentment. Additional discontent will occur when the dominant group acts with little regard for what the recipient group desires (Fossey, Joyner). Combating this, however, is the envy generated by members of the more affluent culture. They appear to have more liberties and more

curious objects in their lives. Although conservationists may be resented, their lives are envied, making the local response to them ambiguous (Fossey, Joyner). Cultures that feel inferior to the other will borrow more than they will give, although in the case of the conservationists, the borrowing between cultures seemed more or less equal.

Due to the abundance of complex reactions to conservationists, the success of complete conversion to conservation ideas is very difficult, if not impossible, as the stories of these conservationists point out. What was more likely to be incorporated into natives traditions were the Western traditions that could make life easier and better for the locals. Here old needs could be met, prestige could be gained, and enhanced chances of survival were possible. Even if the Western form of life could be more complicated, it ultimately could mean less manual labor in daily chores. Even with improved living conditions, natives can be frustrated when they realize that they cannot completely assimilate. Although the standard of living did increase amongst converts as did the level of education, natives could be ultimately disillusioned when they realized that they could not live completely as did foreigners (Joyner). Even with improved quality of life for some, it is argued that internal economic changes will not lead to changes in a country's economy (Sherman). Instead, the contact between the cultures leads to the recipient's culture membership into the global economy, which results in even further changes to the environment because of the increased value placed on materialism and the increased activity in commercialism.

The story of conservation in Third World countries does not end here. Mimicking the hierarchial upsetting parables in the New Testament, the presence of field workers can also undermine power structures (Weiss 1993a, Weiss 1993b). Although first contact clearly places the learned and wealthy conservationist in a dominant position, subsequent tension filled interactions and maturing relationships cause them to doubt their own Western ideology and to become more sensitive to oppressed peoples (Weiss 2). Talking in different languages challenges social structures, not only of the subordinate culture, but also of the invaders. Poor grammar usage of the conservationists causes natives to see them as having less power (Joyner, LaBastille). Humor and word play replaces tensions, further challenging the hegemonic way of thinking, and opens the way to a two way dialog that upsets power dynamics (Joyner). Intimate relationships where natives are recognized as having agency further empowers them as does the constant debt of field workers to natives who perform small favors in order to accrue more power themselves (Joyner, LaBastille). The participation of the outsiders in "non elite" activities, such as harvesting corn or building huts, further upsets power structures (Fossey, Joyner, LaBastille).

Being female, the conservationists further challenged traditional male domination and affected power flow. Passes were made in response to the confusion of power relationships (Joyner, LaBastille). Sharing in such intense working and living conditions leads to an intimacy that coupled with the confusing reversing of hierarchial schemes, can counteract the possible negative influences of Westerners and their culture. In addition, conservationists are not the sole representative of Western culture nor are they the only ones with agency. To place all

responsibility of cultural exchange solely on those from the First World is to further devalue natives and to continue Western imperialism.

### **Solutions**

It seems that this discussion runs in circles. On one hand conservationists seem nearly powerless to affect positive change, and if they do, it is at the risk of negatively influencing people by exposing them to harmful Western influences. On the other hand, they may have a lot of power to upset the power schemes that they are at the same time inadvertently promoting. Despite the unknown and confusing results, making a decision to help other countries conserve may be necessary given that it is the Western influence that precipitated the entire ecological crisis in the first place (Fossey, Joyner, LaBastille, Swanson). To withdraw from active participation may not only be harmful, but may be the ultimate show of dominance, imperialism, and lack of assigning agency to others because once again the First World decides what is best. Yet, to engage in conservation may just be an "utopian amusement more than a probable pursuit" (Axtell, p.272), and although it may not result in cultural change, it can certainly abuse individuals. Combining lessons learned in mission work may enlighten this dilemma of conservationists, just as ecology can balance out missionary work that otherwise has contributed to the extinction of people (Prance). After all, it seems only natural to combine possible approaches of both missions and conservation as they seem so inseparably intertwined.

Most would advocate an open dialog between members of both cultures (Weiss 2), as well as with non-human nature. Understanding can be enhanced by gaining knowledge regarding specific and local ecology and social parameters (Boff, Clark). Otherwise, generalizing peoples and their land will only lead to their integration into the global political and economic system which could lead to extinction of all manner of species and cultures. Understanding can be accomplished in a variety of forms, only one of which is research (Bathgate, Daneel 1998, Taiepa 1997). Small groups allow for the exploration of environmental values in different cultural contexts, and help individuals to investigate their own values (Burgess 1988). Native cultures can also be explored if outsiders relate to natives on kinship terms, such as spending time with the people, acting like a relative, and helping each other out (McDaniel 1995). Whatever the method, neither the Gospel nor science should have the last word (Weiss 2). Instead, native and Western knowledge of the environment should be combined as should native and Western religion (Taiepa). Native religions should also be allowed to have their input because of the possible benefits of primitive and archaic beliefs to ecology (Gilkey, McDaniel, Sherman). Values anchored in the environment and upon tribal commonality may serve better than Christian ideology and can offer healing visions to offset colonial economy (Charleston, Grinde).

Although important, research should not supplant training (Haller). Environmentalism should be taught to all people from a variety of religious perspectives (Daneel, Testerman). Religious leaders can be encouraged to promote environmental awareness in rituals, which can

be combined with strategies for community development and conservation (Nanthakun 1998, Payulpitack 1992). Methods should address root causes. Simply building parks or reserves does not eliminate root causes (Bavington). Instead churches, as well as conservation groups, having the flexibility to disengage from power structures, should continue to support unpopular causes (Haller). Projects should be built so that they are locally self sustaining, do not need foreign experts, and do not drain or transfer scant resources.

Some argue that raising the standard of living along with tailoring beliefs to local culture should be the aim of environmentally concerned missionaries (Gustafson 1992). Without balance, this thinking runs the risk of continued imperialism and promotion of consumer societies. Similarly, ecologists should be aware that people are part of the environment, and that forests are saved by saving the people (Deb). Science and environmental ethics are only good when they recognize social and political issues (LaBastille, Shrader-Frechette 1981). Churches and conversation efforts, therefore, should develop as resource centers for holistic and integrated programs (Gustafson, Wright). In all efforts treaties should be honored and native people allowed autonomy to direct environmental use (Taiepa 1997). While working together, groups should also recognize and respect their differences. For instance, natives see their land as normal, conservationists see it as exotic, and natives live off the land and conservationists do not (Swanson).

## **Conclusion**

At times it may have seemed as if the purpose of this paper was to settle once and for all if conservationists are the reincarnations of evil or naive missionaries. If they are not, but only bare a resemblance to those who have in the past been destructive to environments and peoples all over the world, should they still be encouraged to leave their birth lands and go out amongst native peoples? For a repentant conservationist such as myself, this is a critical question. Unfortunately this research has not given me, nor anyone else I suspect, an answer. If anything, it has only raised more questions. Given that really good questions only raise further questions and that there may be no answers to this dilemma, then this paper has not failed. Maybe instead it has armed the potential conservationist or missionary with possible questions and the humility to ask them. Perhaps it is in the deep unknown of respectful questing that answers can be created and lived, even if the conscious understanding of them is not for this generation or for myself.

*When you realize the value of all life,  
You dwell less on what is past  
And concentrate more on the preservation of the future.*

Last words of Dian Fossey  
Written the night of her murder  
December 1985

## Resistance is Not Futile

February 2017

*Everyone one of us is held in creation's hand - a part of the interdependent web. - Therefore, strangers need not be enemies, - no one is saved until we all are saved, - and all means the whole of creation. -*

Rev. William Schulz

We at One Earth Conservation, the nonprofit organization I founded, feel an urgency to offer our Nurture Nature Program on a widespread basis, because of the need to develop communities of resistance, resilience, and solidarity. We have much work to do, the very reweaving of our culture, to make it stronger, and to make it more beautiful and inclusive. Our evolved biology is a dangerous thing, and that is why we need to be as intentional as we can to guide our culture's evolution.

In *Sapiens, A Brief History of Humankind*, author Yuva Harari writes "Biology enables, Culture forbids." Biology provides for a vast repertoire of possible cultural expressions, and it is our cultures that can put the brakes on various possibilities, such as violence, sexual coercion, consumerism, etc. This is at once both liberating (we can overcome our biology) and daunting (it is up to us). Harari goes on to write that in fact, though we have made progress in so many ways through various cultural revolutions, suffering seems to increase exponentially in each phase of human development. This is because our cultural myths, which bind our cultures in ever advancing cooperation amongst more individuals, have allowed and thrived on oppression and domineering hierarchies. Each cultural shift appears to give us greater freedom, but really just lands us in a bigger cage with more room for suffering.

Ross Douthat in an opinion piece in the *New York Times* on February 4, 2017, called "Who Are We?" specifically refers to the myth of the USA being a land of divinely guided settlers and pioneers where the dream of prosperity, freedom, and equality could be achieved by all. The USA was built upon this and much good came of it, yet it is a story of untold suffering for Native Americans, Africans, and the wildlife on this continent. The myth is losing favor, though it is far from dead. We see evidence of backlash in the USA's election season of 2016 against those who would throw away the human and white exceptional story of pioneer America because it represents so much harm. We have no current myth that can both replace it and include it, even honor it, binding us all together. Instead we have a political process in shambles.

What myth will work that transcends globalization, commerce, religions, politics, and ideologies, and at the same time recognize the heritage that made both the American dream possible and deadly? We need a new story that takes into account that there is no beauty without

tragedy, and that beauty and tragedy connects all individuals, each of which has inherent worth and dignity.

Such a story allows us forgiveness of ourselves and each another. We could not have gotten to where we are now, with the hope of mass cooperation diminishing suffering on a global level, without having gone through our imperialist, genocidal, racist, and extinction producing past. With forgiveness in our hearts for our kind, we can move forward.

Steven Pinker in *The Better Angels of Our Nature* indicates that we are on a knife's edge - we could go any direction. Our biology can still enable the very worst that we can do to one another. We could lose all the gains over the millennia that may not have reduced suffering, but has reduced violence. In recent decades, it seems possible to diminish suffering with recent decreases in global poverty rates. Pinker's solution for what must be done is to deluge the world with a story based on an empathetic and deep awareness of nature, human and otherwise. This is a story based on the inherent worth and dignity of each individual being,, and that every being strives to live, and live well. No ideology can trump that story.

Such a story might allow us to move to the next stage of cultural evolution that actually opens the cage doors and liberates everyone. We need a larger myth that does not give any space to oppression, and only accepts liberation if it is for all of us. And by all, I mean all of creation - all species, all individuals.

We don't know how to organize under this story politically, or what it looks like, but we do know that what we are doing now is not working. Maybe our new way will be that of a "vitacracy" - a way of organizing our communities that is based on life. The needs of all individuals matter within the biotic community. Each individual of all species has a vote, and indeed does already vote by being part of the whole. We just need to acknowledge those silenced voices, tally their votes, and see where life leads us when we consider the needs of each and all.

In the meantime, how do we live with the tension of existing in a world of utopian dreams mixed with dystopian nightmares glaring at us through our social and news media? Let us tell the story far and wide of the inherent worth and dignity of all, and let that be our source of resistance, resilience, and solidarity. Maybe hope will come out of that, and maybe not. But for one moment, when we speak of beauty and tragedy indivisible, we are inviting momentous change, and that out of our witnessing must come real political engagement. We persistently ask, "How do we live together, well, all of us?" I don't know how to live this way exactly, but when we testify, we are living it, and exerting our political selves that resist any way of life that does not accept and affirm all of nature, human nature and otherwise. Each of us can do this at any moment - in conversation, in activity, and in thought. When we do it together, we are ever more greatly empowered and nurtured.

Let our mantra be, "Biology enables life, Culture affirms life."

## Vows and Bows for Black Lives

July 7, 2016

Today was the day I had scheduled to write about how changing the Unitarian Universalist First Principle from the inherent worth and dignity of "every person" to "every being" can aid human beings, not just in terms of spirituality, wholeness, and becoming fully who we are, but specifically in terms of alleviating the multiple oppressions facing humans. As an advocate for humans and other animals (wildlife veterinarian and Unitarian Universalist minister) I believe that my perspective and experiences can help clarify the moral morass of how we live in a world where harm and benefit are interwoven into the very fabric of all life on this planet. In light of this week's shooting of Alton Sterling in Louisiana by police, the shooting of Philando Castille in Minnesota by police, and the targeted shooting of Dallas police officers by one or more gunmen during a peaceful protest, I don't know how to write through the pain, or how that writing could be of help to anyone. So I write for myself, to make sense of something that cannot be undone, this unraveling of human community that shreds families and lives without end.

Perhaps, if I am honest, I also write to speak to other people of privilege who think that by announcing our take on things we can nullify the anguish. As a white person, isn't it time, as Black Lives Matter urges, that I make a safe space for black people to come together and then go to the back of the room, keep quiet, listen, and have my heart break open? I don't feel silenced. I am silenced. There is a longing for wholeness that washes over me when I am given my marching orders on how to be present to the lived experiences of others. It is no easy task. These events of the last year, and this last week, hit me like a whiplash, my attention ripped from my daily concerns to see more deeply the lives, love, and hurt of others. May I not return my gaze where it once was directed, but draw on agitation and awareness so that my actions angle my path forward ever more towards reconciliation and justice.

So today I try to hold the anguish in a very specific way for black lives in the United States. I want to know, I want to feel despair and then anger, and then the thrill of action. But let me be so very human, though a privileged one to be sure, that I cannot turn from the pain of police officers. My son, a person of color from Honduras, serves as a police officer in North Carolina. Confusion and anger, his or mine, it's hard to know, seeps into me with every phone call and text between us. He is on the front lines, battling racism as his job calls him to protect, to be safe, and to control situations. How can any of us protect those whom we love and create safety when it has all gotten so out of control?

I can only imagine how the family members and loved ones of those who have died and been injured might have woken up this morning, petitioning with a heart too broken perhaps to rise out of bed, "Can't we take back the violence and bring my dear beloved back?" And those of us more removed, did you ask yourself, like me, this morning, "How can I take back all those

years of inaction, of not being completely and soulfully swept up in the beauty and the suffering of the other?"

It's not that I have been idle. I have dedicated my life towards improving the lives of parrots and people in Central America, including witnessing and being in solidarity with marginalized indigenous groups and those descended from slaves. The trauma of those experiences knows no bounds, nor does the beauty. I get that there is no hierarchy of pain and suffering, and do not judge my efforts and experiences as inconsequential. Even so, I suspect that though I have studied "intersectionality," where the various forms of oppression link to each other, I carry the burden of white supremacist enculturation that demands, "Look at the suffering of this group, now, in the way that *I* see it!" I have not made or had enough room to love, listen, learn, and act all that I could have.

I vow to do so, as I bow down before the agony of our times. The very act of bowing down low causes to rise up from the body into awareness a sense of humility and interconnection. These I ache for. So I bow before you, dear black lives, dear life, dear earth, dear many others of all species, mourning, and longing to really see the beautiful other, and in holding that beauty, be able to hold their suffering. I want to see the other's point of view, and I want to see it before things get further out of control, before there is any more violence or pain. I pray that we can really see each other, and in that furnace of beauty and suffering, may we find the strength to start again, and again, until we humans find a way to live in humility, awareness, peace, and love.

My prayer finishes with a song from the rock opera, "Jesus Christ Superstar."

*I've been living to see you.  
Dying to see you, but it shouldn't be like this.  
This was unexpected,  
What do I do now?  
Could we start again please?*

*Now for the first time, I think we're going wrong.  
Hurry up and tell me,  
This is just a dream.  
Oh could we start again please?*

*I think you've made your point now.  
You've even gone a bit too far to get the message home.  
Before it gets too frightening,  
We ought to call a vote,  
So could we start again please?*

Please?

## Centering for Freedom

January 2018

I was born into a racist culture and family – specifically in Atlanta, Georgia. We moved to Northern Virginia in 1968, only a few months before Rev. Martin Luther King Jr. was assassinated. My parents enrolled me in Louise Archer Elementary School, an all African American school, founded in a black neighborhood mostly fenced off from white suburbs. I started only a few months after the school had been desegregated and I was in the first batch of white children to attend.

I found myself making friends quickly with Thea, who I invited home so that we could practice a school play. She lived nearby, but on the other side of that fence, which we climbed to get to my house. My mother came home from work and saw us playing in the living room and told me to get Thea to leave. As soon as she left my mother slapped my face and said, "Don't you ever bring another \_\_\_\_\_ into this house again!"

My family has a lot of work to do and so do I to combat that training to see more worth in some than others, and undoing the fear that I would be loved less if I thought any differently. Though my example is more extreme than many, none of us escape this enculturation.

My family is not just my biologic nuclear family, but it is my cultural family anchored here in the USA. I didn't know how that family had trained me into a dominating colonizing culture until I started to work in Latin America. I consulted with the Puerto Rican Parrot Recovery project. Once a million of these birds lived on the island pre-colonization, but by 1973, only 14 remained

The indigenous people were long gone due to European colonization, and the parrot nearly went extinct due to the large deforestation of the island after the invasion by the USA and colonization in 1898. The USA collapsed the Puerto Rican economy and put sugar cane all over the island. Due to extreme efforts, the parrot numbers somewhat rebounded. But the recent hurricanes this late summer, Irma and Maria, devastated the people and the parrots there, who were already vulnerable due to past and ongoing extraction economies, and institutionalized, racist business, taxation, and aid practices.

My human, USA family has a lot of work to do, and so do I because I benefited and continue to do so at the cost of the many. None of us escapes the work to stop this extraction and domination economy that marginalizes and colonizes others.

I responded to the work my human family and I had to do by taking up the call to Unitarian Universalist (UU) Ministry. My sense of family grew to incorporate Unitarian Universalism. While preparing for the ministry I learned the long, hard, and painful history of how Unitarian Universalists had made many mistakes regarding how people of color were treated in our movement, multiple painful episodes since, and ongoing, ones as evidenced in the book, "Centering: Navigating Race, Authenticity, and Power in Ministry".

My UU family has a lot of work to do. I know this because I am at the forefront of a UU movement to understand how what harms animals, also harms humans. We ask how extending our sense of the inherent worth and dignity to individuals of all species helps humans too. This work brings up the pain caused by how deficient UUs have been with people, as well as other species. This is uncomfortable, painful, and stressful work, and it seems that none of us can say or do the right thing. Sound like fun? It is hard, but there is a tang of freedom in the air. You are invited to join us as various possible denominational changes, votes, and study groups are coming in the future, including by reading this book. My family is doing the work, and we need to do more, for we have not won freedom yet. We won't until we work for intersectionality.

First off, it is not shame or blame or pointing fingers at who oppresses more or is oppressed more. We all are enculturated to be oppressors and oppressed. We are not to blame, but we are responsible. All of us.

The world has lived with 500 years of modernity and colonization to hide the reality that we are inextricably tied to one another and all life in beauty, tragedy, and death. Wishing for life at any price continuously calls forth death - the death of other people, other beings, the extinguishing of languages, ideas, cultures, and worst of all, possibilities and degrees of freedom (Andrea Weber).

We all are trapped. Our work for freedom is undoing the core oppression for our co-liberation. For this liberation we must learn to live without fear and to die courageously.

This is a death of individualism so that all are centered. In the circle of life, the suffering of another is also ours. In the countries in which I work in Latin America there is constant evidence of the devastation of colonialism and US foreign policy. The people I work with, descendants of disappeared indigenous cultures and slaves, and the dearth of wildlife, do not let me forget it. But I am so alive there for it takes everything I've got to show up and be vulnerable. What began as a wound ends in a caressing touch. I'm undone and then made whole.

The work for freedom means we center the marginalized voices. Our individualism dies every time we allow another to speak. And we are born again.

We must center what we marginalize within ourselves. Miki Kashton, a leader in Nonviolent Communication, told me a few weeks ago to not believe a thing you grew up thinking or doing, for it was all based on core oppressions. We need to lay aside the armor that doesn't protect us, but fetters us. Let us lay that burden down.

We must center ourselves in history, ecology, and biology. We must look at past societal practices and how we have been harmed and benefited. Thank goodness for our neuroplastic brains, which are ready to believe that power over is the only way to meet our needs, but can also learn that cooperation and co-liberation brings flourishing to many lives. We must accept that we will die and no level of control will stop that. We must embrace reality - to accept all that is now

and also, paradoxically, do everything in our power to change it. We are so powerful in freedoms return embrace. We will need resilience because we tread a fragile path of feeling shame, separation, and oppression, but there is joy lurking in that journey.

We can take a beginning step by sharing our social location when we meet with others, without shame or blame, being honest about our privilege and oppression. We confess before we continue on, such as I did in the beginning of this book, and I repeat here.

My name is LoraKim Joyner. I identify as a white human heterosexual female of European descent raised in the southern USA in the lower middle class, two generations from Alabama sharecroppers, currently living outside of NY City. My childhood was full of experiences and hard lessons taught by family, friends, the surrounding society, and a dominant, oppressive culture that acculturated within me the trappings of privilege, white domination, human domination, as well as victimhood. I am also a mother and grandmother of people who identify as of European/indigenous descent from Honduras. My work in the world is as a conservationist throughout Latin America, wildlife veterinarian, Unitarian Universalist minister, and a Compassionate Communication trainer and practitioner

All of this history and categories of oppression and oppressor cannot be unwoven from my relationships. They form me, but they do not bind me. We can help each other lose these chains of bondage by sharing how your thoughts about how my message intersects with your identities, experiences, and locations of oppression and privilege.

I am held rapt by the power and hope of freedom won together, for none are free until all are free. My father in his older years nearly died of heart failure, but miraculously a heart match was found for him quickly. He was a small man so the heart of a girl of African descent who had died in a car accident became his. My parents were grateful, and softened.

Let us not let death, or the fear of death, keep us from giving our hearts to one another.

## Scaling Up by Scaling Down in Wildlife Conservation

May 2018

Scaling up? Humans love to do this. Enlarging something in size our scope is a favorite activity, unless it is the scaling up measured in on the bathroom scale after the holidays. We like big things, like dinosaurs. Big means strong and powerful.

In my ministry, conservation, scaling up is all the rage. Grantors ask you to fill out in intricate detail, "How will you use what you have learned here and apply it to a larger scale than your original project?" It is a valid question. It's also silly. Therein lies just one of the paradoxes in conservation. The system of conservation funding is predicated on the pretense that results are measurable, that metrics tell us how to improve our outcomes, and that good outcomes can be reproduced not just in another year in the same location, but also in different communities, cultures, and biotic communities, and amidst frequent turnover of actors, funders, and personalities. This pretence is obviously false. But how else can governments and private grantors decide which projects are worth funding? The pretence that metrics (a) represent something real, and (b) apply to a variety of contexts, false though it is, provides us with helpful guidance. It is a useful fiction. Thinking that we can keep control of outcomes as things grow larger and more variable is the moral of the story of now five (and counting!) Jurassic Park/Jurassic World movies. The attraction of scaling up runs into the reality of uncontrollable variables - with disastrous results. Going big leads to unexpected challenges, risks, adventures, and failure.

It's the same in conservation projects, organizations, and our lives. We can't control the outcomes. Nothing is guaranteed for economics, politics, cultures, ecologies, and relationships are always changing. When two or more are gathered, there is love. There is also confusion and chaos.

Imagine having a child you care for. Just as you get use to the parameters it takes to interact and nurture one kind of personality and physiology, you decide to scale up and have another child, who turns out to be completely different. This hit home for us particularly when we took in one Honduran young man, Yency. He came across the Southern Border like so many minors are doing still, seeking asylum. The courts made us Yency's Managing Conservators, and he went on to learn English to the point of correcting me, getting a GED, graduating from college, becoming a citizen, and then becoming a police officer and father. As his second set of parents, we must have been doing something right, right?

We were being so successful we decided to take in another, for so many need the help. Eighteen months after we took in Yency, we took in Osman. Osman was different and difficult. He never learned English, kept getting into trouble with the police, and landed in jail several times. The risks to our home's safety was at risk, so I had to ask him to leave our home, which he

did. We heard later that he was deported, and now we don't know where he is. We must have done something wrong, right? Scaling up to help more young men seemed like such a good idea, but in this messy world where there is wounding and great harm acculturated in all of us for millennia, my experience tells me not to rely on controlling outcomes, even though I seek to wield greater influence.

But we want to scale up - either to care for more children, more communities, more habitats, more beings. There is an urgency, in business perhaps to make money before someone else gets a similar idea, or with social justice, to diminish suffering as fast as we can. Often though this urgency comes because our ego is on the line - if you're good with one, you'll be even better with two, four, etc. We get such praise for our successes, and we imagine that we can do something that will go viral. We also want to control and predict, keep safe and comfortable by having a plan. Money is also on the line - investors want the most bang out of their buck, so in conservation they want' to know that you aren't going to just save one bird or tiger, but well, all of them. And they want to know exactly how you are going to do it.

Such control exerted by outside forces to a project wastes time and resources with endless reports and funding applications, and employing managers to write, process, and judge them. Worse, the illusion of finding “one answer that will fit all” keeps us from life-giving connections and relationships with others that are transparent, honest, and based on equality and empathy. We have to get it "right" or the money will stop. Believing in answers that are right, we risk distancing ourselves from engaging in the very deep, messy, and relational aspects of conservation that not only can improve outcomes, but can also connect us to life and each other. When we put all our energy into measuring outcomes, we neglect the immeasurable grounding from which good outcomes grow. We also believe that if we are successful that it can all be done in a matter of a few years. Our projects are a minimum of 25 years, and probably more likely need to be 250.

Conservation depends on people. It depends on the people in the lands where species and habitat are at risk. And that means conservation efforts are embedded in a cultural context that has been shaped by centuries of colonialism, patriarchy, racism, exploitation, dehumanization and oppression. Conservation that is not attentive to the need for justice cannot build relationships of trust and respect. Conservation that doesn't build relationships of trust and respect cannot succeed. The conservationist's task is the task of love, the task of building liberating relationships. Yet it is just that task that the urge to scale up diverts us from. Building relationships is necessarily small scale. Building justice is necessarily very slow. You can't do either if you're thinking you're going to scale up metrics to an impersonal scale and you're going to get it done in a few years. Any answer we have right now are tainted by the history of colonialism and exploitation.

For one thing, conservation programs based on steady income streams and “business as usual” participate in an oppressive system that turns a blind eye to the painful existence of those across all oppressions. For example, Alex Dehgan and Cassie Hoffman wrote an influential article, *Addressing the Problem of Scale in Conservation*.<sup>14</sup> They recommend market-based solutions, ignoring the reality that the market in much of the world continues to be the means through which the powerful and privileged exploit the poor and the dispossessed. The market also does some good things. Reality is complicated and paradoxical, and conservation needs to be based in reality.

Dominion, the core inequality and oppression, that leads to patriarchy, white supremacy, and human exceptionalism, is rife in our relationships and in the DNA of our organizations. To save this earth we must suspect everything we have been taught to believe and every “solution” that comes out of such a system. Authentic conservation will conserve species and habitats by liberating people from the systems of dominion that lead us to exploit each other and this earth. No one really knows how to do this authentic conservation, for we are all imprisoned and cannot see how we need to free ourselves and others from an economic and social system that both benefits and harms us. The oppressed pick up the tools of the oppressors, with the result that all of us are oppressed in some ways and all of us are oppressors in other ways. Some would suggest that the very idea of scalability in human institutions is itself a form of domination that ignores the levels of chaos and creativity that exist in relationships.

With such unknown outcomes, conservation is an act of faith that we can do better, even though there is not necessarily evidence that we will or will do so in time. Participating in conservation and congregations is also art, an original creative peace that cannot be reproduced on a large scale. One reason that it cannot is because each relationship, each community, each region, each biome, each species is not an autonomous machine that has predictable behaviors. Each unit dances with one another uniquely, and the next day takes a different step in another direction. For me the key is not to let go of my dance partner – to keep engaged through the chaos, risk, and unknown, and rest in gratitude when one can. Over the long arc of a project we slow down to see the many missteps, admire the beauty, and celebrate the lives saved, the suffering diminished, and the aliveness in our hearts. We must also mourn for all that is lost and cannot be preserved, and for the limitations of our short lives and lack of vision.

I think often of a simple and undramatic line in "Lord of the Rings." Legolas, Gimli, and Aragorn are holed up together with the soldiers of Rohan at Helm's Deep. They are vastly outnumbered by the approaching Orc army. The soldiers are afraid. "And they should be," says Legolas. "Three hundred against ten thousand." Aragorn says, "They have more hope of defending themselves here than at Edoras." Legolas exclaims, "They cannot win this fight. They are all going to die." A little later, in the final moments before the battle begins, Legolas finds Aragorn and says, "it was wrong of me to despair." That's the line that touched me in its

simplicity and its tenderness - its intimations of inner strength. If ever there was cause for despair, Legolas and his companions have it. We see that he is not blinded or in denial about the situation. They really cannot expect to get out alive.

If ever there was a cause for despair, it is the world we live in of climate change, loss of biodiversity, and signs of civilization and biome collapse. So much is already lost. So much more will be lost, and I cannot prevent it. I despair, I do. And then my inner Legolas voice reminds me, "It was wrong of me to despair." Not a day goes by where I don't hear of a parrot poached or harmed, a corrupt official sabotaging another's good efforts or very life. Not a sun sets on a day in which I have not confronted by own heart's uncertainty. I pray though that I will not let go and will keep engaged. There is not one project, though, where I have not been tempted to run away, and several where I have. Who wants to live every day with a punched-in-the-gut-feeling? But if we let go, then maybe the miracle, the new way, will not come into being. The challenge is to be present to loss and the unknown for the long term.

We change minds and communities by commitment, but not controlling the nitty gritty of relationships. Transformation happens by being in solidarity, not by being in control. Minds and hearts change when we are not fixated on a preconception of what we want them to change into. Transformation happens when we are as transformed as they are.

In La Moskitia, Honduras the odds are overwhelmingly against the survival of the indigenous people and culture, their forests, and their wildlife. Corruption, violence, and poverty abound. There is no hope, and once again a line from "Lord of the Rings" comes to mind. Gandalf has fallen to the Balrog. The others escape out of Moria, then pause to regroup. Aragorn says, "Farewell, Gandalf...What hope have we without you/" He turns to the company. "We must do without hope," he says.

We continue on in La Moskita without hope. In 2014 not one endangered wild scarlet macaw in our core conservation area escaped the illegal wildlife trade. We had located some 20 macaw nests in this area. Each nest had 1-2 chicks, and every single chick had been poached. So, what did we do? We dug in harder and slowly grew our community patrols and built a Rescue and Liberation Center. In 2016 and 2017 not one macaw chick in our core area entered the wildlife trade. We had gotten the poaching rate for his area down from 100% in 2014 to 0%. Now here in 2018 we are back once again with no truck, it broke down again, lack of money, conflict abounding, death threats, and nests are again poached. But what are we doing? We are fighting ever harder. We will not go. Sometimes there are hopeful signs. And when there aren't, "we must do without hope."

Other conservationists have come to the same conclusion. In the documentary "Virunga" about conserving gorillas in Africa's Virunga Park, the title song's refrain is, "We will not go."

For over a hundred years this park has endured, with countless lives lost, and won. And there is no guarantee of future results; it is just the stubborn faith in life that shines through the lives of the people who bring to their work an inscrutable persistence in humility. André Bauma, one Virunga ranger, says, “You must justify why you are here on this earth. Gorillas justify why I am here. They are my life. So if it is about dying. I will die for the gorillas.” Another guard Rodrigue Katembo says “I have accepted to give the best of myself so that wildlife can be safeguarded. Beyond all pressure. Beyond all spirit of greediness about money. Beyond all things. All that could happen to me I will accept. I am not special.” This movie came out in 2015, and now in 2018, the park is temporarily closed because of an untoward number of rangers killed and some tourists kidnapped. What works for a while, might not work for ever. What works in one place might now work anywhere else. Andre and Katembo are unique. They have a way of being, a style of courage that no reproducible metric can capture.

The movie poster for "Virunga" says that “Conservation is War” Some days it feels like that, but over the years I have come to see how conservation is also peace. Peace for a species, biome, or community is not a “top down” deliverable that can be won with metrics, workshops, and conservation plans. Peace is a grueling endeavor that takes place every moment in our inner lives and in our relationships with existence and other beings. We strive to bring to awareness that we are all connected in beauty and tragedy, and in that vulnerability, with every breath we strive to diminish suffering and augment flourishing. We do this by attuning ourselves beyond ideology or politics to the needs of ourselves and others.

I am not saying there aren't some teachable and learnable skills. There are. There are philosophies and principles and approaches that can be written down in books and that can provide some very helpful guidance. But that guidance is never sufficient. It must be adapted in different ways by each conservationist, and each unique person they talk to and work with. Then the magic happens. Or doesn't. Skillfulness improves the odds, but guarantees nothing. And skillfulness is not an algorithm.

The practice of authentic conservation trains one to scale down and to build peace with every thought, word, and action, and to mourn and admit vulnerability when we, others, or groups fail. Authentic conservation is a practice of attending to all the needs, human, animal, and ecological, that are before us, mindful of historical and economic patterns playing out, creatively and gently building new patterns.. It is a practice of staying engaged, beyond measure, beyond profit, beyond reason, beyond hope.

By scaling down to the minute and intimate, I have faith that what happens here today can help us become communities of resistance, resilience, and solidarity, even if just for one moment. We long for more moments, so we do dream big in conservation, and that what we do can spread around the world, but we do this scaling up by scaling down to the preciousness of

every encounter, however brief, to the faces of those around you right now, and to the beauty and the loss that will not let us go.

## Coliberating Actions

*We can't expect the grace of liberation if we haven't taken responsibility. We take on the work of freedom not by tearing each other down or calling each other out. Instead freedom comes from the building and inviting each other in. There is no easy path to freedom, so we urge on our motivation by remembering that if they aren't free, we ain't either. So let's get free.*

Inspired by Brittany Packnett

### Introduction

Here's the neat thing about coliberation; as long as you are liberating one group, you are helping to liberate yourself and other groups. There is caveat to this, however. One must keep one's eye on dismantling the core oppressions and constantly analyze one's own actions as they can't but help be tainted by a domination mindset and practices. Our organizations, relationships, internal thinking, and actions are full of macro and micro-aggressions, reflecting our enculturation to operate according to a global system based on inequality, patriarchy, racism, and human domination and exceptionalism.

These following examples are reflections centered on parrots, however, the general approach might be informative for other species. Oppression impacts each species and each human demographic very specifically, and dismantling each comes through relationships, analysis, and messy steps forward and backwards. Caution is advised then when applying any of the approaches to a new scenario or a new species, or even to another parrot species. As in the chapter, "Scaling Up by Scaling Down" suggests, each biome, community, species, individual, and relationship is unique and we all go forward with trial and error, failing and mourning, cherishing and celebrating, and solidarity and engagement over the long haul.

May these examples help you make it so.

## **Birding for Life**

May 2017

### **Birding Enhances Our Spiritual Intelligence**

Spiritual Intelligence is the ability to transcend individual ego concerns and perspectives by connecting to that which is greater than the self, fostering wisdom, acceptance, compassion, presence, and mindfulness. The goal with SI is to intentionally loosen the sense of self and increase our conscious and subconscious knowing that we are other bodies, all bodies, small and large, each and all. Empathy with yourself, with another human, with other species, and with the ecological web of relationships build upon one another so that you can enter the realm of being not just one with the all, but all. You/I/she/he/it/we/they are not separate from others or the all of life, but simply one organ, one cell, or one grain of sand in existence that makes up reality.

Mindfulness is one spiritual practice to grow SI. By bringing our awareness to the present moment, we still our inner chatter and our minds and emotions integrate in ways that bring health, choice, and compassion. Watching birds is such a mindfulness practice. One way that it serves is in focusing our cognitive function on identifying the bird. This keeps us in the present moment by looking at the bird and taking in its behavior, sounds, habitat, and the time of year. Many senses and cognitive functions simultaneously engage as the bird keeps our attention to the here and now. We can also let go of our reasoning process a bit and just “be the bird.” This too is a cognitive function, but also engages the limbic system for greater engagement and integration of our neural processes.

We can also raise our awareness of what others are experiencing as well as augment our empathetic abilities by engaging in scenarios where we imagine we are the bird. Empathy is the ability to understand the emotions of ourselves and others and is a primary component of emotional, social, and multispecies intelligence. This is helpful for us and for the birds. In one research study, Jaime Berenguer encouraged students to try to imagine how a bird feels.<sup>15</sup> This exercise resulted in an increase of emotions associated with empathy, a greater willingness to spend money on environmental protection, and an enhanced perceived obligation to help nature. In another study<sup>16</sup> humans were tested for tough-mindedness. A lower tough-minded score is associated with a higher degree of empathy. These humans interacted with parrot chicks raised in captivity. Greater tough-mindedness in the humans correlated with greater stress in the chicks.

Jim Austin, Zen practitioner, bird watcher, neural scientist, and author, suggests another way in which being with birds grow our awareness, and in the Zen tradition, can lead to moments of enlightenment where we let go of our daily ego concerns and feel a profound sense of connection with the All, and with everything. Zen lore is full of such stories.<sup>17</sup>

*The disciple was always complaining to his master,  
 "You are hiding the final secret of Zen from me."  
 And he would not accept the master's denials.  
 One day they were walking in the hills when they heard birds calling and singing.  
 (recording of bird song)  
 "Did you hear the bird sing? said the master.  
 "Yes" said the disciple.  
 "Well, now you know that I have hidden nothing from you."  
 "Yes."*

Here the disciple is saying yes to life after hearing a bird call. <sup>18</sup> What Buddhists have known for years we can now describe scientifically. "By regularly practicing both concentrative and openly receptive styles of mediation in ways that minimize our Self-centeredness," we can cultivate "sensitive awareness that has instant, effortless access to ...deep, global processing functions.<sup>1</sup> These functions open the way not just for peak experiences of awareness and losing the Self, but build a way for sustained awareness that operates at very deep and integrated levels in our minds.

Dr. Austin was explaining this to me one time on a bird walk and I told him about how I had a flash of opening and a sense of oneness after seeing a parrot flock burst out of the trees. This happened when I was working in Guatemala to save the endangered yellow-naped amazon. With my companion we came up to the forest edge as the sun rose over the steamy tops of the trees. Just then a flock of loud parrots arose, startling us. The next thing I knew I was on the ground sobbing. I had a flash of love and acceptance, for self, and for those of us caught in a web of beauty and tragedy in this war-torn country.

He asked me if I had been looking up, "Yes." "What direction were you looking?" "To the right," I replied. "Were there sounds," he asked? "Yes, the birds were quite loud." He then told me that often when others speak of increased awareness when around birds, it most often comes when looking up and to the right, and often with sounds involved. I had always wondered what had happened on that morning and what had triggered the insight I gained. Was it God? Grace? Luck? Neural integration? Mother Earth telling me something? I believe it was all of this, as well as my human brain that was wired for such knowing, and for responding to a practice that can light up our lives with joy and hope.

Birding, and any mindfulness practices are not just for ourselves, though they seem to be at a superficial review. The story of Lazy An points to a different understanding. Lazy An was a monk that appeared do nothing all day but sit under a blossom tree and smile. The villagers thought he was crazy or lazy. But what they didn't notice was his joy in seeing the trees slowly

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<sup>1</sup> James H. Austin. Avian Zen. *The Eastern Buddhist* 44/1:1-12.

blossom around him and birds alight on his shoulders. So great was his joy that he became a great leader of monks, for as others found through his example permission to be happy and to follow their childhood dreams, they also found that they had an incredible source of energy to care for others.

### **Birding Enhances our Multispecies Intelligence**

We can augment how birding helps others by focusing not just on mindfulness, but on others. We do this because humans are prone to judge others as being different, wrong, or of less worth than us. One check to this “othering” and inherent tribalism, is to develop our multispecies intelligence. Multispecies intelligence is the ability to understand and use emotional intelligence, communication, and behavior across species lines for the mutual benefit of all. It requires understanding species needs, behavior, motivations, and interconnecting relations with others and their habitat. We do this in part by seeking to know the motivations for the behaviors, such as understanding their subjective experience (emotions and internal processing) and needs. This means employing what is known as critical anthropomorphism: “Critical anthropomorphism refers to a perspective in the study of animal behavior that encompasses using the sentience of the observer to generate hypotheses in light of scientific knowledge of the species, its perceptual world, and ecological and evolutionary history.” By engaging in critical anthropomorphism, we avoid two errors on either end of the spectrum of multispecies understanding: one is to say that other species are nothing like humans (anthrocentrism), and the other is to say they are exactly like us (uncritical anthropomorphism). Critical anthropomorphism means that we imagine what it is like to be in the shoes, paws, hooves, wings, claws, feet, and skin of another, and then to check ourselves where we might have made either of the two types of errors. We put on our scientific lens, and ask, what is this individual feeling and needing? We put on our empathetic, embodied lens, and ask, what is this individual feeling and needing? We employ all the science and sensory and body resonance that is available to us, study, reflect, discuss, check our assumptions, and then ask: How might my perception of another lead to more harm than good?

A prime example of how we wrongfully see humans in multispecies community is the statement, “Humans are the only ones who \_\_\_\_\_.” In terms of prosocial behavior, I have heard it said that humans are the only ones who can choose to beneficially act on another's behalf. Other animals are using instinct or subconscious automatic behavior patterns. Perhaps they are only acting thusly because of human intervention. If ever you are tempted to say “only humans do X,” or “humans have greater choice or do similar behaviors for different reasons,” or if you read, “what sets humans apart from animals” become immediately suspicious of why you or others are saying that. You ask yourself if such a phrase is to promote human exceptionalism, where humans are better than other animals. There is another kind of human exceptionalism: where humans aren't better than others because of behaviors and intent, but are actually worse. Either way we are committing multispecies errors, distancing ourselves from ourselves and others, and setting up harm to others, and inviting despair, depression, and debilitating disconnection that disempowers us.

While watching birds then, keep in mind the errors to which we are prone. We "be the bird" by letting go of reason, yes, but we also engage our critical thinking to understand the thinking, emotions, motivations, and behavior of the bird. We continually ask ourselves how we might be projecting our understanding of humans onto the bird. We check ourselves by discussing our observations with others, and by researching bird ecology and behavior and adapting our interpretation of what we see. We can apply our improved understanding to what the needs of birds are in our area, and we can respond with greater care and activism to improve their lives, such as planting trees and shrubs that offer food, nesting, and protection for birds.

Birding Enhances our Ecological Intelligence

*Ecological intelligence is not speech. It is an act. It is an act of weaving and unweaving our reflections of ourselves on Earth, of scattering eyes upon it, and of scattering the Earth upon our eyes. It comes alive between yes and no, between what is and what is not, between science and non-science. And as soon as it becomes acquisitive, something egotistic...it vanishes.*

- Ian McCallum<sup>19</sup>

If one pauses to consider one's place in life it is clear that as individuals and as a species, humans belong on this planet. Earth comes out of star dust, oceans come out of earth, Africa comes out of the oceans, and we come out of Africa. We are well versed to be full members of the universe. We also know through the science of physics and ecology that we are inextricably interconnected to all of life and that our existence depends on others and earth's processes. However, we live in a constant state of forgetfulness, and cultural practices seek to wipe clean any memory of interdependence and replace it with separation, where we do not feel welcome and hence do not welcome others into a life of flourishing. For this reason, we need to hone our awareness of reality through the practices of Ecological Intelligence (EI). Birding is one such EI practice.

Ecological intelligence is the capacity to recognize the often-hidden web of connections between human activity and nature's systems, and the subtle complexities of their intersections so that we may minimize harm and maximize flourishing for all. It is both an intellectual and an emotional expertise that strives for nourishing others as yourself, for caring for one is caring for all. There are multiple ways in which our lives are held together by the web of life. The elemental atoms within us came forth from the big bang, forming the first stars. Much later, when the dust of stars coalesced into Earth, the carbon, hydrogen, nitrogen, and oxygen parts of that dust arranged themselves into molecules. These molecules, such as water, first produced primordial seas, and then were processed through towering conifers, dinosaur blood, and Jesus' tears to come to rest in you. You who breathe today take in the oxygen that was once part of the body of fish, bird, and *Homo neanderthalis* and they become you. We who live today exist because of those who lived before us, and because of those who live now alongside us.

We exist in a complex, dynamic, and coherent network. It may feel, at times, like a sticky mess where our allegiances are torn between ourselves and others. The reality, though, is more harmony than cacophony. In some ways, our lives cannot help but sing in that harmony – we can't help but play out the nature that eons of evolution gave us. In other ways, though, we can train ourselves to better hear the harmonic subtleties and add our voice in a way that consciously supports the entire vast choir of existence.

Birding is part of this training. By paying attention to birds we discover the often-hidden interconnections of interdependent malfeasance. Once we train ourselves, we realize that birds near and far are in trouble. Species are declining at alarming rates and climate change produces extra stress and challenge to which we are unsure the birds can adapt. The goal of birding though is not to experience shame, but to gain awareness about the mesh of interdependent malfeasance in which we all are stuck. Interdependent malfeasance is when one action or set of behaviors may also lead to a chain of harm that echoes through many lives and individuals. It may be hard for humans to see examples of harmful ecological behavior outside of our own actions given our propensity to romanticize the concept of ecological balance, and denigrate our own species. We tend to think that whatever another species does to harm another contributes to maintaining a habitat, but what we might do knocks things out of whack. In reality, there is no such thing as ecological balance. Yes, there are fairly tightly woven pockets of interaction and interdependence but these are always being rewoven as species evolve and the planet changes. Life came and went long before humans came into being, an estimated 99.9% of all species that ever existed are now extinct

During the Late Devonian (360 million years ago) the world's waters were teeming with extensive reef systems and marine biodiversity. But sea levels rose, giving access of some species to new environments. Some of these species were so numerous and dominant that they outcompeted other species, resulting in a mass extinction in the seas, resulting in a collapse of reef systems and their entire disappearance from the world's oceans for 100 million years. It seems that humans are not the only ones to threaten reefs, yet we have the capability to not do so. We need to feel good that we do good, and can choose good, because it can have a large ripple impact. This counterbalances how bad we feel for the many ways we are involved in malfeasance. We need this countering effect so we can have the reserves to reduce our harm, which also feels good.

So how can birds tell us of our interconnecting relations of harm with others? If you have a cat in your life and let them outdoors, they are most likely hunting, and this leads to death and suffering to wild birds and animals, as well as diminishment of species whose populations are under threat. Having the cat outdoors also places him at risk for accidents, fights, and infectious disease, for himself and for others. If you elect to neuter your cat to reduce risk of fighting, roaming, and more cats, the adopted cat is impacted by experiencing pain and not living

out the full potential of evolution's call to reproduction. Vaccinations are also momentarily painful, and in some cases, can cause more long term hurt. If you keep your cat indoors your needs for flourishing of life, as well as the cats, might be impacted as cats evolved for the outdoors. Feeding your cat also causes harm. Most likely your cat eats cat food that contains animal protein. A large percentage of store bought cat food contains fish meal, which means that our fish died and suffered, and also our oceans populations of fish were put at risk. Other animal protein comes from animals raised in intensive farms where animals such as cows and pigs experience pain and suffering.

Even a simple bird feeder has implications, for we are not only benefiting birds when we feed them. The food placed in the feeders is grown often intensively, replacing native habitat and employing the use of pesticides and herbicides. The food might also come from quite a distance, adding to climate change through the use of petroleum products in transportation, as well as during planting and harvesting. Bird feeders are often the source of infectious disease, even when cleaned thoroughly as birds can transmit disease from one to other. Furthermore, predatory birds know about bird feeders, and visit them often to hunt and secure their own food. Inadequate placement of bird feeders can increase the risk of death due not only to predation, but also to window strikes as birds come and go to the feeders.

Knowing how easy it is to cause harm, we adopt the precautionary principle that our actions cause harm and that we seek to never rend any single fragile thread in the web of life except through extreme necessity. We look not to harm, but to maximize the good that one single action of ours can produce. To do this we become detectives to discover how we are connected to beneficence and malfeasance by knowing our ecology, and being prepared to accept the reality of our interactions. In a sense, we put on our scientist hats and our impartial observer robes as we minimize preconceived notions of wrong doing and right doing. The goal is not to look for blame, but to see how interrelated we are to the world with each breathe, thought, and action. By looking for relationships we enforce the reality of how we belong on this planet, for better or for worse for ourselves and others. In the long run, I believe holding this awareness will not only be good for others, but for ourselves, for we are connected through nurturing and benefit.

When one individual or species is nurtured, these actions positively impact a plethora of species and ecological niches, and this is known as interdependent beneficence. One example of this are top carnivores which are involved in tri-trophic cascades, which impact other predators, herbivores, and plants. For instance, when sea otters hunt sea urchins, this helps keep kelp forests healthy which impacts a wide variety of species, including humans. Kelp forests help soften the impact of waves and current in coastal areas. Humans too can offer benefit to many other species in one fell swoop. For example, we may have hunted with early wolves, who in turn benefited so that they could contribute to ecosystems through their impact on prey species, who further impact plant systems.

By being honest with ourselves and learning of others, we live authentically and flow with the reality of the world instead of being imprisoned in how our culture in the past has thought of other species. We learn things that connect us to others through our common roots of star dust and DNA, and through basic shared and common needs. We all want to live, and live well, and in life seeking its full expression through each, we can experience profound belonging and awe. We are invited into a living world that is full of wonder and life- giving relationships possible at every moment. When we watch birds, we nurture ourselves, and so grow our capacity to nurture others. Even as one walks through an urban setting, we can take in the throngs and see that there is more to life than the superficial glance that writes off life as being made up of drab species living in a desert of biodiversity, as writes Mary Oliver in the poem, "Starlings in Winter."<sup>20</sup> After looking at the starlings in the leafless winter and in the ashy city, she ends...

*I feel my boots  
trying to leave the ground,  
I feel my heart  
pumping hard, I want  
to think again of dangerous and noble things.  
I want to be light and frolicsome.  
I want to be improbable beautiful and afraid of nothing,  
as though I had wings*

Birding helps us embrace reality, not just of the world of birds, but of all existence. In the movie, "The Thin Red Line," the hero, a soldier in the South Pacific during World War II, muses as he discovers a dying parrot chick on the ground that had been blown out of her nest due to the bombs that were insuring the mutual destruction of plant and animal life.

*One man looks at a dying bird and thinks there's nothing but answerable pain. Another man sees  
that same bird and feels the glory – feels something smiling through it.*

We embrace reality, not to torture ourselves, but to nurture ourselves and others. Rev. Meredith Garmon, a Unitarian Universalist minister, explains how it this way.

*Reality is never depressing. Being in denial, being out of touch with reality, pushing it out  
of consciousness, so that it has to sneak around, come at you from behind and crawl up  
your back (for reality eventually finds a way to get through to us), that's the source of  
depression. Struggling to resist irresistible reality - that's what triggers depression and  
stress. Reality is never depressing.*

*As a species, we did not adopt the Ecospiritual Imperative to connect spiritually to nature in a way that would have empowered us, in joy, to preserve the Earth we knew. As a result, now we face the Ecospiritual Challenge to fashion what life we can on the new Earth. The Ecospiritual Challenge is walk a third way: not denying the reality we face, and not retreating into everyone-for-herself-survivalism. It is the path of open-eyed and open-eared awareness, and also the path of connection to both nature and neighbor - not afraid to face reality, not avoiding needed knowledge because it's "depressing" and you'd rather not think about it. And at the same time not bunkering protectively. The Ecospiritual Challenge is to choose neither despair nor defense, but new community.*

This "new community" is one where all belong and are connected and interdependent to each, and to the whole. Birding brings us into community and welcomes us to the family of life, as exemplified in a poem by Mary Oliver, "Wild Geese."<sup>21</sup> She tells us that we do not have to be good, and that we only have to love what the soft animal of our bodies love. She ends with...

*Whoever you are, no matter how lonely, the world offers itself to your imagination, calls to you like the wild geese, harsh and exciting, over and over announcing your place in the family of things.*

### **Liberating Wings**

We bird so that all beings may be free. We do this by growing our spiritual, multispecies, and ecological intelligence, but also by focusing on them. We watch birds, count them, share our sightings as citizen scientists on eBird, research their ecology and conservation status, and then join with others to combine our cherishing to stop their perishing with acts of advocacy and compassion. By so doing we become liberationists. Peruvian theologian Gustavo Gutierrez, founder of liberation theology, stated that for us to be free and saved we need to have a "preferential option for the poor." Our birds, poor in habitat and cultural and family security., need us.

We are called to take care of the least of these, the most oppressed, and ourselves as well. The beauty of birds reminds us of the beauty of this earth, and of ourselves. If we can remember that, we liberate ourselves as we liberate all life.

**Parakeets and Paracletes -**  
**A Reflection That Encourages Us to Tell Our Stories and the Stories of Others**  
 May 2001

Have you ever been anxious about finding a solution to some problem and an answer comes to you in a dream? I once had one of those dreams. I was trying to discover an important truth or a story, which, if told, would bring peace to the beloved community. Near dawn the answer finally came: parakeets and paracletes. Partially awakening, I wondered – perhaps like you are now – what birds have to do with paracletes, but when I came fully awake I realized that parakeets are not just birds and paracletes does not refer to athletic footwear.

Parakeets are a type of parrot, which is one of 27 Orders of birds. Parrots differ from other birds in part by their strong, hooked bill. Paraclete is the Greek word for advocate, comforter, and counselor and is found in several verses in *John* of the Christian scriptures. Let me read a few of them:

*God will give you another Paraclete, to be with you forever.  
 This is the Spirit of Truth...you know her, because she abides with you and she will be in you.  
 When the Paraclete comes, he will guide you into all the truth; for he will not speak on his own, but will speak whatever he hears.*

Scholars believe the author of *John* is writing in hopes that Jesus will live on as the Spirit of Truth in us and in all life, including parakeets.

How can parakeets tell us of truth? Their biology and brains are so different from ours. Nevertheless, parrots have a remarkable capacity to communicate with us. Some species have a vocabulary up to 1,000 words; others can speak in whole sentences and have the intelligence of about a human toddler. In a veterinary medical symposium where I was teaching a class on parrot conservation, I spoke of how parrots are beautiful, often let us touch them and stroke their feathers, they talk like us, and they are so smart. I asked the veterinarians why they thought evolution had produced such an animal, because these traits seem to threaten their survival instead of help them. The more they are appealing to us, the less likely they will exist in the wild due to poaching for the illegal pet trade. One veterinary doctor answered that perhaps it was just a gift from God. I don't know what she meant by "God" but I do know that she had heard the truth of these birds, a welcome truth of interconnection, beauty and wonder that these birds can tell.

Parrots can also tell us things we would rather not hear, like the man who received one for his birthday. The parrot could really talk, but every other word was a foul word; and, if not speaking crudely, he was just rude. The man didn't like listening to this rude and crude parrot so

he tried to teach him more polite words. It didn't work. He yelled at the bird and that didn't work because parrots like loud noises. Finally, in a moment of desperation the man put the parrot in the freezer. For a few moments he heard the bird squawking, kicking and screaming. Then suddenly there was quiet. The man was afraid that he had hurt the bird so he quickly opened the freezer door. The parrot calmly stepped out onto the man's hand and said, "I'm sorry that I might have offended you with my language and action and I ask your forgiveness. May I ask what the turkey did?"

Parrots today might ask a similar question. What they did to deserve extinction at our hands? Their ghosts fly overhead, plaintively crying, "How did we get to be here?" "Why are you so sad?" As we witness the steady anthropogenic decline of biodiversity, some therapists say that there is a general sadness and desperation that undercuts all our lives. If we wish happiness we must address the ages-old injury our culture and beings have suffered. For our own sakes, as well as the parakeets and the world they used to fly over, we must listen to what the parakeets tell us and be paracles – advocates and the bearers of truth. We must do this because injustice is not a thing of the past, the loss of the parakeets, just as the many other kinds of losses we experience, live with us today as grief. Someone wrote recently, "The Carolina Parakeet, last seen in 1904, is now extinct. My grandfather was part of the last birding expedition, which searched for it. They failed to find it. I mourn."

I mourn too, not just for the birds or for myself, but for all those who will never know what it is like to have parrots wild in their own backyard. Here in Florida we do have some chance to experience this, because of so many who have made a new home here, outside of their normal habitat. You may know their beauty and their wildness and find ways to face that our way of life has and continues to injure them and many other beings on this earth. In facing both the tragic and the glorious, we grasp our responsibility at the same time we find the courage to answer the cries of the dying and suffering.

In *The Thin Red Line*, a movie about war in the Pacific where gunfire and bombs killed not only people but also the wild parrots of the island, the hero heard the whole truth. He said, "One man looks at a dying bird and thinks there's nothing but unanswerable pain. Another man sees that same bird and feels the glory – feels something smiling through it." The Carolina Parakeet is no more, but parrots give us much to smile about.

They herald divine possibilities, as did the parrot who shouted, "Jesus is coming, Jesus is coming," when a thief broke into his house. The startled thief was relieved to see only a parrot talking so he relaxed and asked, "Parrot, what's your name?" "Moses," answered the parrot. "Moses! What kind of people would name their parrot Moses?" The parrot answered, "I guess the same kind of people that would name their Rotweiler Jesus."

This parrot Moses does not exist, but there is a Moses that is real and he is also a parrot that spoke of sacred possibilities. When working in Guatemala on parrot conservation, I knew him by the Spanish version of Moses – Moisez. The Guatemalans with whom I worked named him Moisez, because he was astounding and was a prophet who blessed us with the spirit of truth.

He came into our lives one morning during our monitoring of wild parrot nests, most of which were poached or destroyed. For three straight days we'd been watching one particular nest with two eggs. The parents had not entered the nest once. No eggs could survive unincubated for that long. We climbed the tree and lowered the eggs to the ground. The eggs looked dead so I put them in a closed container in our black jeep, rolled up the windows, and left them there for several hours while we went on to climb two more nest trees in the heat of the day. Nothing could have survived that hot car. Afterwards, I drove the jeep fast along the rough dirt road, bouncing and bumping the eggs on the floor of the jeep before I remembered them and asked someone to hold them in her lap. When we got to the aviary and I had better equipment to look at the eggs, I saw the shadow of a beak move inside one of the eggs. Miraculously, one chick was still alive! I put the egg in our incubator and a week later the chick hatched. I wasn't sure he was going to survive his first day; but when on the second day he chirped, I heard in that sound the wondrous song of life. It felt as if everyone suddenly burst out singing.

When beauty comes to you like the setting sun and your heart is shaken, you glimpse that the singing will never be done. Parrots like Moses and other forms of precious life, including the lone wild birds we call our hearts, will survive if we could just give them a chance. To give them a chance, we must face the truth of the situation of the oppressed and forgotten, which means our hearts will be shaken with tears. Then we testify to the truth, so that horror will drift away. This will not be easy, because we have inherited stories from millennia of cultural influences that warp the truth.

Cultural influences might have us say that parakeets do not have inherent dignity and worth and do not feel pain, and therefore we shoot them for sport or for their feathers, condemning them to extinction. In a similar way we might say that Africans are uncivilized and then take them for slaves, or accept their modern urban and drug related imprisonment as unavoidable, and not stop the genocide in Rwanda and Dafur. We might also say that gay, lesbians, bisexuals, transgender and QI people are different than heterosexuals and sentence them to a death caused by our own hands or deny their hope to flourish in loving relationships. We might say that progress is the goal of humankind and good fortune for those only with proper documents and ignore the ravished land and those chained to the manacles of economic injustice while we bask in our good fortune. We might say that life is a continual struggle for safety and perfection and throw ourselves into the dungeons of individualism where we torture ourselves

with false dreams. We might say and do all these things, but we don't have to, nor should we. We must be awakened; witness must be given so that life can be guarded.

In the movie *Paulie*, a man and a parrot serve as witnesses to one another. Did you see this movie? It was about a talking parrot that got separated from his owner, a little girl. For years and years the bird kept looking for his little girl until Paulie finally ended up in the basement of a research lab in a small cage. Paulie had been placed there because he refused to talk anymore. Talking only got the bird in trouble; he was afraid to speak. One day Paulie was discovered by a janitor, a lonely man from Russia who had known tragedy and oppression all of his life. He too had learned to be silent, so that he might survive in a harsh world.

After much time, Paulie began to trust the janitor and he began to tell the story of his life – all the beautiful people, all the terrible things people tried to do to him, and the love he felt for his little girl. The janitor was so moved that he broke the bird out of his cage, lost his job, and went on a cross-country trip to try and find the lost girl for Paulie. Well, they found her, but now she was a full-grown woman. As Paulie and the woman went into her house, the woman invited the janitor into her home to share their happy reunion. The shy, fearful janitor said at first “Well I can't. I really must be going” and started to walk away. Paulie spoke loudly to the janitor and said, “Don't be afraid to speak.” With that, the janitor stopped, turned around, and then said the truth, “Yes, I would like to visit with you very much.”

Let us be like the janitor in this story and listen to the birds so that we might not only free them, but ourselves.

They who bind to themselves a joy  
 Do the winged life destroy  
 But they who kiss the joy as it flies  
 Live in eternity's sunrise.  
 - Adapted from William Blake

What am I suggesting here, really? We could tell others of the dark moments of our lives and of others. If we cage our sorrow and tell not the whole story, we risk locking beauty away as well. If we don't listen to another's story, we cage their beauty. There are smiles telling through the stories of our lives, even those that speak of tragedy, loss, pain and our own privilege. Let us give witness to one another so that in telling the story we may know the glory and know how it feels to be free.

## Parrots on Organizational Boards

April 2018

Many boards have members that parrot (mimic) what others say, perhaps timid to put forth their own clashing opinion. Here at One Earth Conservation we have true parrots on our board who do not imitate anyone. They speak for themselves, as long as we never forget to ask, **“What does the parrot say?”**

To ensure that we don't get swept away with human "exceptionalism" and exceptionalism, we have three parrots on our board. Why is that? If we only have one bird on the Board, then they would not have allies, remaining a marginalized and often silenced demographic. It is common practice to not tokenize or patronize minorities by placing them on a board until a board has been trained in anti-oppression practices, candidates have allies on the board in solidarity with them, or they have an ally from their same demographic. We also have three parrot board members for varied representation, including one whose demographic is from a Neotropical lineage of parrots (wild and rescued Central American scarlet macaw Rosa - *Ara macao cyanoptera*) and being deceased, her position invites us to think of all endangered or extinct wildlife. Rosa's inclusion invites us humans to openly mourn and share our grief. The other two birds come from the Afro-Asian-Australian lineage of parrots (homed Myer's Parrot Pluto - *Poicephalus meyeri* - whose ancestors are from Africa, and homed cockatiel Dusty - *Nymphicus hollandicus* - whose ancestors are from Australia).

Okay, that answers the question of why three, but why any at all? Having parrots on our Board helps us in a ritual and symbolic fashion, serving as a Council of All Beings. We seek more than empowering the voices of despair and worth in other beings; we aim to act upon what they specifically tell us in relation to our work. Boards are charged with having connection and linkage to their constituents, which in the case of One Earth Conservation, includes parrots. By having them present in our hearts and minds when we make decisions, we hopefully cannot stray too far from hearing their voices and remembering their needs.

Boards are also charged with being accountable, especially to marginalized groups that may not serve on a board. Our current Board is mostly made up of white people from the USA, and one person from Honduras. Our partners in Latin America are diverse, and since we work in coliberation with them, we have to be accountable to them as we work on projects there. To further increase our accountability we have begun a Conservation Council that helps us link to the lived reality of people from this region. Regions are represented by native Latin Americans who work on our projects, to whom we look for honest feedback and guidance, and for whom we muster all the transparency that we can. This same process needs to happen with other species as well. We deliver our “product” of supporting life and need to know how we are doing, and what we could do differently. By having parrots on the Board we hear their voice, their needs, and their skilled and embodied opinion “on being parrot.”

So how does a different species interact with a human legal entity? It is true that New York State, in which we are incorporated, does not specify what species a board member must be, and we assume that “competency” guidelines would not admit that a parrot might contribute anything more than a great ape might. So instead we are enacting our own policy that asks with every new project, vote, or in depth discussion, “What would the parrots say?” The parrots cannot speak for all of life, so we also ask, “What would our partners say? What would the people of the world say? What would life say?”

And in all these cases there is no rote or easy answer. For each time we ask this, we hear about the needs, feelings, sufferings, and lives of other beings. If we are to truly serve life in our nonprofit organization, we must listen to life, and connect to life, which is a messy and painful affair.

You might wonder how a parrot can communicate with us, especially one that is dead, such as Rosa. If a human is speaking for a parrot, aren't we susceptible to our own ego protections and perceptions? Well of course! However we have mechanisms that ask us to maximize our empathy and bring to awareness that we are also the other.

First we study as much as we can know of a parrot's life – their behavior, feelings, needs, motivations, physiology, health, and conservation status. When we ask “What would the parrot say” we reflect most directly on their welfare status as affirmed by the “Five Domains.” If we were a parrot, what would our needs be, and what might their subjective experience be? It is far from perfect, but I believe that it gets us closer to those we serve, and also connects us strongly with life. When we ask, “What does the parrot say,” there is a shift in the room (virtual or otherwise), a lightening of the heart, an alignment of our values, and a deeper connection to life.

We have parrots on our Board because we hope that it is good for them, and we know it is good for us.

## Letter from the Parrot Nations

August 2017

*Dear Homo sapiens,*

*Whoever you are in the Americas, you are tied to the harvesting of parrots. If you claim indigenous blood, you took parrots for food and home long before Europeans ever came ashore. And if you are claim European descent, your ancestors started taking parrots from the Americas with the very first return voyage of Christopher Columbus. Those of African descent perhaps captured parrots in their homeland, and traded in them as well once in the Americas, especially in the Caribbean. If you are currently in North America, you too have been importing parrots for decades, especially if you are from the USA. You also were part of national genocide that wiped out not just the indigenous humans, but North America's indigenous parrot, the Carolina parakeet. And if you are a parrot, your genetic background knows of a plentitude of your kind that darkened skies with the size of your flocks, whereas now your diminished size only clouds both human and avian spirit.*

*Let us not judge one another, for none of us escapes the domination system under which we live. Our cultures taught us well the habits of oppression, white supremacy, racism, colonialism, and speciesism. Whether agent or recipient of a harmful act or thought, both are prisoners in world less beautiful, more dangerous, and less biodiverse. We have been led to believe that we must sell or extract what is rightfully ours, our native and biological heritage, our children's future and the future of all earth's children, to survive in the oppressor's world.*

*Every parrot we poach, sell, or home are the pieces of silver that betray our own well-being and that of others. For we are saying that life does not matter, earth does not matter, the future does not matter, I do not matter, and neither do you. You are being bribed with a false sense of connection and security, needs which cannot even remotely be met by captive parrot alone.*

*Rise up poachers, lay down your slingshots, machetes, axes, and climbing ropes and spikes. These are all tools of the oppressor which enslave you as you capture others.*

*Traders and buyers, empty your pockets of greed, for earth's temple should not be a den of thieves. When you sell a being, you have sold your soul.*

*You with homed parrots, open up the doors to your caged minds, for when you imprison another, you imprison yourself.*

*And you parrots, beat your wings against those cage doors until the sounds of the captive's cry can be heard around the world.*

*Let your lament be the wind upon which we all rise. If one is fallen, so are we all.*

*Choose liberation. Let us all be free at last.*

### **Response to Letter from the Parrot Nations**

Parrots of many nations, thank you for your gracious vision on how we humans, along with you, must get at the roots of oppression that threaten us all so that we can gain coliberation. I have worked for liberation alongside you my entire life, and it is so much harder than simply choosing to join the parrot nations. It requires great courage and engagement, from which I have often fled. Why would anyone of us take our heads out of the sand or storm that beach only to take on any more work, stress, guilt, or shame than we already carry? I answer this with my own aching heart, and I suspect yours as well. As Bryan Stephen writes, “I believe that on the other side of confession is liberation.”<sup>22</sup> So, let us share our stories of how we all are caught in the system of domination, power over, and oppression. We will not compete as to who has more worth depending on our behavior, but we will listen and take the hands, paws, wings, fins, and hooves of all as we strengthen our multispecies communities

Stevenson goes on, “We are all broken by something. We have all hurt someone and have been hurt. We all share the condition of brokenness even if our brokenness is not equivalent. The ways in which I have been hurt—and have hurt others—are different from the ways others I suffered and caused suffering. But our shared brokenness connected us. But simply punishing the broken or the breakers--walking away from them or hiding them from sight--only ensures that they remain broken and we do, too.” There is no wholeness outside of our connected animality, which says that our very life comes out of the commonality of evolution and oppression.

I am with you feathered liberationists that we cannot be free, or free others, until we talk about the brokenness that connects us, until we talk of the abuse and use of ourselves and others in our culture of domination. We must talk of how all lives, and by all, I mean all species, have been harmed or imprisoned by our lack of creative imagination of what freedom would like for all beings. A life of freedom is being able to work at your own speed and choice for meeting your needs, and have the resources to choose freely. So many of the animals in our lives and around us do not have these choices. Where can we offer more freedom to the animals in our lives?

I know the tightness in the belly and in the mind when we speak of animal liberation and freedom for others. I recall how Peter Singer’s book, “Animal Liberation,” has probably caused more arguments than most any other book ever printed. It tied in racist and sexist views to actions of discrimination, and how this same process is at work in speciesism which allows us to think of others, of any species, as having inferior status. We see them not as individuals, but as objects and means to fulfill our desires. Who really wants the challenge of this task, to either

have the conversation with others, or to be shamed or forced into changing our behavior, when we are unsure if anything we do will have any impact?

Thank you psittacines of the world for urging us to go forth, the outcome of our pursuit for mutual liberation unknowable. We don't know what such a world would look like, but if we don't look deep into the false girders that build walls to cage our own lives, we won't invite the possible of what could be. The *adjacent possible*, writes Steven Johnson, "is a kind of shadow future, hovering on the edges of the present state of things, a map of all the ways in which the present can reinvent itself."<sup>23</sup> The past and present prepare us for any number of futures. Depending on what groundwork has been laid and what ideas are floating around, certain new thoughts become thinkable. As Johnson suggests, "The strange and beautiful truth about the adjacent possible is that its boundaries grow as you explore them."

## **The Freedom Project**

The Freedom Project is brand new, imagined by One Earth Conservation and our nonprofit partner in the USA, Foster Parrots. It exemplifies building of coalitions, intersectional justice, and firm assertion of the coliberation of all. We invite you to join this movement on the ground floor and help one another soar. The following prospectus describes the pledge, mission, and goals of this project. Further information and resources can be found on One Earth Conservation's website ([www.oneearthconservation.org](http://www.oneearthconservation.org))

*Take the Pledge for Freedom by Joining...*

**The Freedom Project**

*No Cage Is Big Enough*

*None Are Free Until All Are Free*

*Tu Casa No Es Mi Casa*

### **Introducing the Freedom Project**

The well-being and survival of parrots and other wildlife is imperiled globally due to the wildlife trade. Extraction from the wild results in suffering, abandonment, death, extinction, and in the destruction of natural ecosystems, environments and indigenous cultures. Members of the global community can confront the truth that consumerist demand harms wild populations and individuals who are inherently worthy and autonomous beings and whose freedom is best expressed by belonging in their natural habitats (No Cage is Big Enough). We need a global consensus to decrease this demand by affirming that birds and wildlife should be free and not be held in a captive situation. In order to truly perpetuate the Freedom Project, we invite all animal welfare and wildlife conservation organizations and individuals to embrace the project and make it their own. Together let us galvanize an international movement that advocates for the well-being of all life (None are Free Until All Are Free).

#### **Pledge:**

1. Affirm the mission and vision for the Freedom Project
2. Embrace the concept of freedom for birds, animals and people as a core value
3. Pledge to take one or more action steps annually

#### **Action Steps:**

- Incorporate and perpetuate the Freedom Project logo (when it is available) and ideals on and through your website and social media, in your educational materials and in other ways to identify yourself as a participant in the movement.
- Write one or more articles or blogs about the Freedom Project to grow the movement.
- Recruit other organizations and individuals to sign on.

- Display *No Cage Is Big Enough/None Are Free Until All Are Free/ Tu Casa No Es Mi Casa* posters or messages where appropriate
- Donate funds/time to promote the movement or locate and cultivate funders.
- Give a presentation and/or set up an information table about the Freedom Project at public events.
- Visit homes and take action to help improve the lives of parrots (and other animals) being kept as pets, while delivering the conservation/freedom message
- Get involved in or donate to conservation efforts

### **Movement Participation:**

Everyone can participate in this movement, whether you've had birds in cages in the past, or currently do. Remember (and mourn) that we all are oppressors and oppressed and that this project is not to shame you or call you out, but to call you in. I have been an owner and killer and extractor of birds, but I am heartened and healed by a vision for life on this planet that sets me on the path to freedom, and may do so for you as well. This is the vision of the Freedom Project:

Wildlife lives free and flourishes in natural habitats while the people with whom they share the biotic community prosper as the international community pledges to support them in solidarity and commitment.

The goal is that you too will prosper.

This flourishing within the Freedom Project centers on wildlife by perpetuating a strong stance on animal welfare values and to alter attitudes toward captivity through widely disseminated slogans, visual cues, and community activities. We encourage partner organizations to use the slogans and apply them to the animals they represent. Free, downloadable posters, flyers and informational handouts will be available to member organizations via the forthcoming "Freedom Project" website. Posters, t-shirts and other merchandise will also be available for purchase. Participating organizations are welcome to create their own informational and visual materials bearing project slogans.

Participating organizations and individuals will be represented currently on the One Earth Conservation website ([www.oneearthconservation.org](http://www.oneearthconservation.org)) and in the future on a dedicated website for the Freedom Project. We will include a photo, logo, mission statement, and informational paragraph with a direct link to each participant's website.

**Mission:** Unifying and strengthening organizations and communities worldwide in a movement to end captivity for parrots and all wildlife.

**Vision:** Wildlife lives free and flourishes in natural habitats while the people with whom they share the biotic community prosper as the international community pledges to support them in solidarity and commitment.

**Project Goals:**

- To alter public understanding and perception globally to the extent that the sight of a parrot or any wild animal in a cage will be unacceptable to all.
- To create a global community based in compassion, empathy and respect for all living beings, including all humans, through educational programming, mentorship, conservation work and solidarity in the non-profit sector.
- To diminish the suffering of birds and other wild animals by decreasing poaching, the international wildlife trade and habitat destruction.
- To promote the intersectionality of the oppression and well-being of humans, animals and the environment as the impetus to take action to heal our planet
- To inspire an international movement that stands in solidarity with communities that live with native parrots and other wildlife, and so address their needs for flourishing and liberation.
- To deepen the belonging, resilience, connection and commitment to life around communities and organizations involved in this movement

## Parrot Conservation Corps

### Introduction

We at One Earth have an audacious idea - that marginalized communities can preserve their wildlife, and we can achieve a global network and consensus on how people view and preserve their wildlife. Parrot power resides in the community and the individuals who are claimed by historical ties to the biotic community in which they are embedded. To grow mutually in power, we are developing an international Parrot Conservation Corps that decreases the wildlife trade; protects biodiversity; empowers local communities and shifts global attitudes through direct conservation efforts. These projects include the Freedom Project as presented in the last chapter, and our Nurture Nature Program that emphasizes natural human intelligences. We are having an impact because we believe that all individuals of all species have worth and dignity. Conservation and community life flourishes when built upon the concept that none are free until all are free. With so much at risk, we invite you to join us and help us to grow our work for the co-liberation of all.

You can join us wherever you live, though currently our conservation work is concentrated in the Americas. Our goal is to support people, organizations, and communities who cherish and preserve their biotic communities in strategic ways that work for their particular species and locales. No matter where you are, you can get involved.

### **Background: One Earth's Mission, Vision, and Goals Influence Our Parrot Conservation Corps**

The Parrot Conservation Corps works according to the mission and vision of One Earth Conservation:

The mission of One Earth Conservation is building knowledge, motivation, resilience, and capacity in people, organizations, and communities in the United States and internationally so that they can better cherish and nurture themselves, nature, and other beings. This mission is achieved by combining work directed outward toward other beings and outward towards nature with work directed inward toward one's own human nature, as outer well-being and inner well-being are inseparable and mutually beneficial.

We seek to heal human systems that diminish individual worth and separates humans artificially from the rest of nature in many ways. We affirm that people must be healthy and develop multiple intelligences so all of life, individuals, and human and biotic systems on Earth can flourish.

One Earth Conservation invites people into a vision and practice of *interbeing*, based on:

1. All individuals of all species have inherent worth and dignity (all bodies are beautiful, have worth, and matter).
2. All individuals of all species are connected to each other in worth, beauty and well-being.
3. We are also connected in harm. There is no beauty without tragedy. What is done to another, is done to all of us.
4. Embracing this reality, humans grow in belonging to this wondrous planet and the life upon it, and so embraced and nurtured, can nurture in return.
5. This reality of interbeing makes us both powerful and vulnerable, therefore, we need each other to grow and to heal as much as possible.
6. Humans are adaptable and can change, both individually and as families, organizations, communities, and societies. We can become more effective and joyful nurturers and naturers. This is hard, deep, intentional, and a lifetime's work.

Our Outer Work has these following goals:

1. To stop the negative impact of poaching on individual parrots and species in Latin America
2. To grow capacity in avian conservation medicine and parrot conservation in Latin America
3. To improve the lives of homed parrots in Latin America
4. To instigate and then initially support parrot conservation projects in the most needed areas.

Needed areas are defined as:

- Where there is very little to no parrot conservation efforts or capacity
- Where communities are marginalized due to socioeconomic factors
- Where there are endangered birds
- Where we can have the most impact for our size
- Where there is little funding

Our Inner Work has these following goals:

1. Improving the capacity of human individuals, organizations, and societies to nurture and to nature for the benefit of the biotic community and the individuals within.

This work is heralded by our Nurture Nature Program which infuses all our work. The Nurture Nature program is for anyone who desires a better world for themselves and for others. Deep within we know that something is amiss, and that a more beautiful world is possible, for everyone. By nurturing your emotional, social, multispecies, ecological, and spiritual natures, you will experience greater belonging, beauty, reverence, wholeness, joy, and vitality, and so might your families, communities, and organizations. The Nurture Nature Program helps us witness to and stand in solidarity with biotic and human communities, and the individuals within, whose efforts resist the story of Harm and Separation that has wounded them, and promote the story of Interdependence, Beauty, and Worth

### **Concrete Actions of the Parrot Conservation Corps**

1. Train all Corps members in avian conservation, the Nurture Nature Program (the five intelligences), intersectional justice, and the Freedom Project.
2. Support economically the conservation activities of leaders, rangers, educators, biologists, and conservationists in the Americas, especially in marginalized communities.
3. Organize conservation efforts by region, appointing regional directors that can oversee and direct the growth of the parrot conservation projects.
4. Work with organizations and communities who desire accompaniment in their efforts to preserve and cherish their parrots through concrete conservation projects. These projects include programs to:
  - a. Promote and organize Welfare Brigades that are trained in avian conservation, avian medicine, ethics, and the natural intelligences. They visit homes to improve the quality of life of homed parrots in a highly relational manner
  - b. Monitor parrot populations to determine the presence of parrots, trends that might indicate stresses to their populations, and areas where there are still parrots present in numbers sufficient to conserve and with communities that are willing to preserve them
  - c. Monitor and protect parrot nests as poaching is a severe threat to most parrots in many regions in the Americas. We document poaching rates so as to inform organizations, communities, and government entities of the threat of poaching.
  - d. Visit schools and develop multigenerational education and awareness programs, materials, and events
  - e. Offer trainings in parrot conservation to individuals, students, universities, communities, government entities, and organizations
5. Stand in solidarity with communities with a commitment of 25 years, the time it takes for two generations to come into being exposed to parrot conservation.

### **How to Get Involved**

1. Visit our website for Nurture Nature Program events which help grow our natural intelligences so that we can do the challenging work of conservation.
2. Visit our website for information on the Freedom Project and take the Freedom Pledge.
3. Visit our website to see which conservation projects spike your interest. Choose which projects to offer your time, resources, skills, and/or commitment.
4. Financially support our conservation projects and/or our organization as a whole. Consider fundraising on One Earth's behalf.

## Free Falling and Flying

*I'm going free fall out into nothin;  
Gonna leave this world for awhile*  
-Tom Petty in "Free Fallin"

Most species of birds, such as those who nest in trees or at some height above the ground, must first fall before they can fly. Their first flights are often plummets or awkward and dangerous attempts to get to safety. Sometimes the chicks don't make it, and they leave this world.

Life is harsh as is the work of coliberation, and there are no guarantees. But there are joyful surprises and soaring experiences, especially when we fly towards freedom together.

For example, I was working in La Moskitia, Honduras when the nest monitors came back from climbing tall pine trees where macaws nest. As part of our conservation efforts they were registering active nests and checking on the health and status of the chicks. One tree did not have a scarlet macaw, but a nervous red-lored amazon who was at fledging age. The chick startled from the nest when the climber got higher in the tree and fluttered to the ground. The conservation team was then in a dilemma. Should they put the chick back who would probably only fall again and possibly hurt herself, and be on the dangerous ground without parents to protect her, or should they bring the chick back to the village where she stood a chance? The brought the bird back in a sack held tenderly by the two climbers riding on a motorcycle.

I saw the sack as they dismounted at the village and cringed. "What's in there?" I asked, knowing it was some kind of wildlife. "It's a chick that we startled from a nest," Pascacio the climber replied. "Well, go put her back, now. The chick belongs with her family, not with us." "It is too risky to put her back, she will have to stay," Pascacio told me. "It's risky here with us too. Pascacio, you'll have to feed her because she doesn't know how to eat year and doesn't have parents who can feed her. Also, don't let her escape your house because she can fly and will end up in a tree as hawk food because she doesn't have parents who can guard her." I examined the chick and cleared her to go to Pacacio's house, and he left with her, smiling.

Just two days later Pascacio came running up to me with an even bigger smile on his face. "Doctora, you won't believe what happened!" He told me that the chick had indeed escaped his house and ended up a mango tree near his house which he couldn't climb. I wondered why he thought this might be good news, but he continued with his story. He had to go to work all day and when he came back in the late afternoon the chicks was vocalizing with typical chick hunger calls. A large flock of adult red-lored amazons were flying over just then, and a pair swooped out of the sky and landed in the tree with the chick. They then fed the chick and soon afterwards, calling to the chick, lured the chick out of the tree flying towards the forest. The wobbly chick

looked like she would fall to the ground, but the adults flew under her and bumped her higher when she lost altitude. The chick made it to the forest with her adoptive parents.

I burst out laughing, rejoicing that the harm we had caused had been rectified. The chick was flying free beyond all odds.

We might too if we can but risk the fall into love with the world, letting go, letting go for a while guaranteed outcomes and expectations, so that we can flock together with other freedom flyers.

Let's be surprised by love and fly free now!

## **Discussion Questions**

### **Overall**

1. How has this book impacted you?
2. How do you see the world differently, if at all?
3. How will this book impact your relationships and work in the world?
4. What changes will you make in your life and what are your next steps?

### **Prologue**

1. This is an example of a confession and how to invite other voices into the conversation, knowing that domination edges itself into all our relationships (as does egalitarianism). Using the example here in the Prologue, what might your confession statement say?

### **Introduction**

1. What is your definition of intersectionality?
2. What are the oppressions operating in your own life and those around you?
3. What would freedom and liberation look like if oppressions were confronted and relieved?
4. How do you strive for freedom, for yourself, and for others?
5. Why did you pick up this book, and what are your ties to parrots, if any?

### **Mourning Over Puerto Rico**

1. What are your emotional responses to the history of colonialism in the Americas?
2. How do you deal with this quote from Lisa Paravisini-Gerbert, "We are suffering the consequences of Modernity. Any prosperity we had was not built upon anything real." How does one live knowing that suffering and domination are interwoven in our culture and biology?
3. How do you mourn? How might you mourn more effectively?

### **Parrots and People Ravaged by Demand**

1. Who inspires you in your life to take risks with so much at risk?
2. If you have parrots, or have had them, how do you make sense of the beauty and joy that they bring that is tied to so much historical suffering brought about by colonization, extraction and the brutalities of the wildlife trade?

### **Needs of Poachers and Conservationists**

1. Who do you see as your "enemy" or what groups of people do you judge as different, unworthy, or fundamentally flawed?
2. What needs of yours are not met when you interact with others you disagree with or those that cause harm to you or others?
3. Choose someone who you consider "against you." Why do they act the way they do? What are their motivations, values, and needs?
4. Do you agree with the sentiment of this statement, "We are all poachers?"

### **Forced Migration**

1. What have been the migrants that have come into your geographic area, or are still migrating? What are the causes of this migration? What greater forces are behind the migrations that you are aware of? What are the needs behind the people or animals migrating?
2. Have you ever been "forced" to change locations? How did migrating impact your life?

### **My Caged Sister and Her Parrots**

1. How have you cared for ailing relatives in your life? Has there been conflict, confusion, or angst? Has there been beauty, acceptance, and tenderness?
2. How do people with illness or various abilities get labeled and how might these labels harm them, your relationship with them, or how society treats them?
3. How can you as an individual or your society take better care of those who are ailing and the other species that live with them?

### **Missions, Conservation, and Native Peoples**

1. If you identify with a particular religion or spirituality, what harm or benefit do you see in your tradition's practices, beliefs, and history?
2. Why do you supposed religions have been associated with destruction, war, colonialism, dominion, etc?
3. Does the risk of harm keep you from reaching out to help others or to be helped?
4. Have you experienced how social justice or conservation groups have caused harm? Benefit?

### **Resistance is Not Futile**

1. How might you say in your own words the ending mantra in this chapter, "Biology enables life, Culture affirms life?"
2. What practices do you use to guide your biology into more life affirming thoughts, words, and actions?
3. Do you think that it is possible to guide human behavior on a massive scale so that we can have flourishing civilizations where everyone has a chance to live well?
4. Can we tell a convincing story of how civilizations are built upon harm and benefit, and use this knowledge to improve life and communities on a massive scale?

### **Vows and Bows for Black Lives**

1. How has the Black Lives Moment impacted you and your communities?
2. How do you make room for historically marginalized and silenced voices?
3. Where do you bow in humility before others and life?

### **Centering for Freedom**

1. In what ways or with what identities are you oppressed? In what ways or with what identities are you an oppressor?
2. How have you been enculturated into a domination mindset and behaviors?
3. How can you center freedom in your life and for others?

### **Scaling Up by Scaling down in Wildlife Conservation**

1. Where have you lost hope? How do you go on without hope?
2. What in your life would you like to "scale up" and make bigger, more everlasting, and with greater impact? What risks do you see to any enterprise where you might try to scale up?
3. Where do you despair? Do you feel guilt or shame that you do?
4. How can we change our civilization and our lives if "everything we have been taught is suspect?"

### **Parakeets and Paracletes**

1. What truth do you wish you could share, loud and clear, for the whole world to here?
2. What is holding you back from speaking the truth?
3. What truth of others is hard for you to hear? What stories do you need to hear?

4. How might you get support from others to speak truth to power?

### **Parrots on Organizational Boards**

1. How can you bring in the stories and voices of other species into your life, relationships, and institutions?

2. How can we listen to others, knowing that what we discern as their truth comes through the filters of our own subconscious biases and filters?

### **The Freedom Project**

1. Is this something in which you are interested? Will you sign the pledge?

2. If not the Freedom Project, what is your work for freedom?

### **Parrot Conservation Corps**

1. Is this something in which you are interested? Will you join the Corps? How will you do so?

2. If not the Parrot Conservation Corps, how will you work for freedom for all species?

### **Free Falling and Flying**

1. What do you need to let go of to fly free?

2. How would you like to be surprised by love?

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Foster Parrots - [www.fosterparrots.org](http://www.fosterparrots.org)

The International Union for Conservation Redlist of Threatened Species.  
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The First Principle Project - [www.firstprincipleproject.org](http://www.firstprincipleproject.org)



Rev. Dr. LoraKim Joyner is a Unitarian Universalist minister, having served in parish ministry for 10 years in North Carolina, Minnesota, Texas, and Florida. Currently she serves as a community minister in Multispecies Ministry and Compassionate Communication, affiliated with the Community Unitarian Universalist Congregation at White Plains. She draws on her training as a Certified Trainer in Nonviolent Communication and over 30 years as a conservationist and

wildlife veterinarian to co-lead One Earth Conservation. With her team, they support others through their international Nurture Nature Program that seeks to empower the people saving the planet. She travels to areas in Latin America to stand in solidarity and witness to the plight of the parrots of people there, and do what she can. One Earth's current projects extent to Guatemala, Honduras, Nicaragua, Paraguay, and Guyana. She recently published her memoir, "Conservation in Time of War."