



Tales from a Sisters Naturalist
by Jim Anderson

My feathered foster son – Part 3

In spite of Owl's one blind eye, for a number of years we continued to give numerous programs for the residents and guests of Sunriver and the greater Central Oregon area. He was also a regular fixture in my office, fascinating all who came to the "Ecologium," bad eye notwithstanding.

When he was at the mews I fed him his lab rat and that went on without any more problems as we presented wildlife programs. Then we moved to a pole house adjacent to the main highway on the southern borders of Sunriver.

Owl was anxious to get out of his mews, but I kept him inside for a week and took him for walks on the leash to get him familiar with the new location. When I finally turned him loose the first thing he did was try to cross the highway at night and he was struck by a motor vehicle. I found him lying next to the house and highway the next morning, alive but badly hurt.

He didn't have any broken bones, but his good eye didn't look all that good, so back into the mews he went to recover, which he did after several weeks of my soaking his eye with warm water and watching it slowly begin to look like it was getting back to normal. What I didn't know was his sight in that eye was ruined.

When I thought he was OK, I turned him loose again and he immediately flew to the top of the tree next to the house. He sat up there hooting and the response he received were three ravens

who immediately started to maul him.

As he tried to get away, he floundered in the tops of the trees, making it all too obvious he couldn't see. I immediately called out to him and he flew towards me, blindly crashing into branches with the ravens hot on his tail.

I noticed each time I called him he'd immediately make a course correction and turn toward me, so I kept a steady conversation going as he bounced off this and that limb, slowly descending my way.

In a moment he was out of the branches and glided right down, following my voice, landing on my outstretched bare hand, making small chattering noises as he gently got his feet under him.

That was one of the toughest moments of my life.

For years his actions had been without flaw, his health was never in question. His mews were not heated, just covered with a tarp in

winter, and he never complained or showed any trace of being handicapped.

And through my negligence he was now blind.

What would you do if you saw one of your kids in a fix like that? I started to soothe Owl the best way I could, by softly stroking his neck and back. He moved toward me, with what I would have said was a sigh if it came from a human, and suddenly I couldn't see him clearly anymore; my tears got the best of me.

That was the last time my feathered foster son and I had a one-on-one personal moment. Life soon meant nothing to him; I could see it in his attention span, his stance and in his breathing. And then he just quit eating. Three days later I found him lying on the floor of his mews, his beautiful spirit having gone out among the stars.

Perhaps, if I've done things mostly right in this life, when I cross over that gulf between here and the spirit world, I'll find it as my

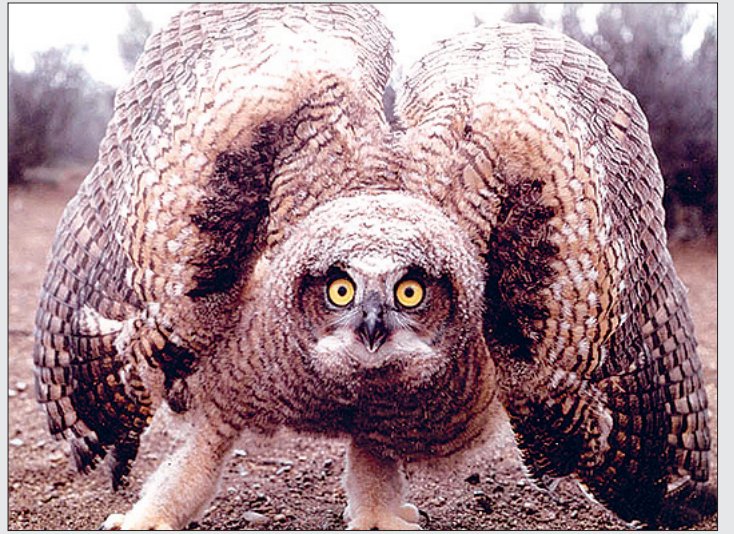


PHOTO BY JIM ANDERSON

My foster son, Owl, when he was surprised by a dog, strange or otherwise.

grandmother told us she saw it in her last breath, "Oh, it's so beautiful here..." and

my feathered foster son, Owl, will be waiting for me, perched on her hand.

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