

WLRN transcript, April's Ode, Edition 56: Women & Animals

*:twinkling, mid-range chimes lilt in, arpeggiated major chords:*

*:hand drums and percussion enter in later:*

April NEAULT: I think I've always loved animals. I only really discovered it when we got our first dog, Bear. My parents had decided we were allowed to get one and I eagerly volunteered to drive up with them to go get her.

*:sounds of keys, a car starting and shifting into gear:*

Driving in our car was a big deal back then. We didn't make many trips "to town" which was made up of just over 2000 residents. Living in the woods had challenges for a kid growing up. I certainly didn't like it when I became a teenager. But as a child it gave me unfettered access to the untamed pine forests of Northern Ontario. For that, I am eternally grateful.

*:we hear the interior of a moving car, the light jingle of dog tags and a dog snoring:*

Bear was allowed to sit in the back seat with me and on our way back home she fell asleep on my lap. I remember feeling so special. Here was this creature that didn't know me and she trusted me enough to fall asleep, on top of me no less!

Like most family dogs Bear joined me on many adventures. I'd be Indiana Jones and she was short round, or one of those evil Nazis he was always at odds with depending on what tales we were playing out. Bear had the habit of making it difficult to hide during a game of hide and seek as her tail end would always be wagging out of the cedar thickets or tall grass down by the water I had chosen to hide in. But I could forgive her anything.

*:clumsy footing in tall grass, a quiet whimper, a girl urging "shh!":*

The passing of Bear and many dogs since has been the hardest thing to cope with in my life. They have always been more than companions for me, teaching me about nature and life wherever we would go. During my childhood, dogs helped me feel comfortable with myself and made it okay to be me. When my anxiety became worse during my teenage years, dogs gave me a reason to get up and get outside. In this

way, they helped me experience a world outside of my mind that told me to be frightened of everything.

When dogs die, I feel like they take with them the best part of me. They shared only the good moments of life.

*:The sound of the woods, tweeting birds:*

*:We hear walking through the woods, and a faster footstep, 4 paws, hurrying by, a jingle of dog tags:*

The part of me that went outside to tell the trees about my day, the exploration that happened in abandoned spaces around where I lived and we marveled together as the natural world reclaimed those spots. *:An excited dog, panting and barking:*

We'd watch patiently as the fox and her kits would cross our path...

*:foxes scurries by and vocalizes:*

...and struggle to regain our composure when a bear would slide down from the old pine tree next to us, to go charging off into the opposite direction.

*:branches breaking and leaves swaying; a bear grumbles and runs off:*

We'd discover mud holes and marshes, salamanders and snakes...

*:Dog vocalizing and splashing through water:*

...and curse those wretched partridges for disturbing our thoughts as they noisily flew away not five feet from where we stood. *:Frantic fluttering and cranky chirping:*

We'd take it all in at the summit of our 4 hour hike and break our sojourn with some homemade snacks I had made in anticipation of our adventure.

*:Panting and tags jingling; Bear crunches down on a biscuit:*

Dogs have taught me everything I've ever learned of value; compassion, humour, and above all else, the virtues of a good afternoon nap. *:dog yawning:*

I have come to realize that the direct nature of the language of dogs and the natural world has kept me sane. That is, they have kept me grounded in reality and gave me

the courage to be comfortable with it. When I decided to give my authority over to the natural world, the bullshit reasoning of human male supremacy all faded away. I owe my life to dogs.

*:sound of happy dog panting, being pet, tags jingle lightly:*