

Telling Tail Tales

Timeline
By Natalie Wong



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F*our years old.* I loved preschool for many reasons, including the proliferation of chaos, fun, and excitement that took place there. Each day was a whole new opportunity for exploration, something that I simply adored. But the most tangible thing that got me ready to go to school each day was the class bunny: Tommy. Tommy was just the right size for a four-year old's arms to hold, and colored black and white, just like a cow. He was quiet as well as calm, and everyone who met him remarked upon how cute he was. As soon as my class was let into the room each day, the first thing each one of us did was race over to the cage Tommy stayed in during the night to softly pet and coo to him. We ogled at his sphere-shaped stools and coveted his long, soft hairs; Tommy was the apple of our eyes. Feeding him or changing his water was the only thing that could get the entire class of twelve or so preschoolers to volunteer for. During the night, Tommy was placed in the hands of capable adults, but I felt as though he never got so much loving care, and never spread so much, as when he was with the class during the day.

Seven years old. I was with my family in Utah, staying with another family friend who owned a dog called Sundance. I have often compared Sundance to being the Cinderella of dogs, beautiful on the inside and out, excluding the cruel stepsisters and stepmother. Sundance would never meet her prince, but she was the savior of many, including an episode in which my sister would have been trapped in a snow ditch for hours if not for Sundance. However, the first memory that surfaces whenever I think of Sundance is how one day, after an intense few hours of playing in the snow with my sister, I was so exhausted that I could barely keep my eyes awake. I did not want to fall asleep though, as hot chocolate was on the way and it was before my dreaded bedtime, but my drowsiness was just too powerful of an instinct to ignore. The last thing I remembered before going to sleep was a golden-furred presence supporting my back as I lied down. Sundance had noticed that I was slowly caving in, and had padded over to act as a temporary bed. Today, I fondly browse through photos of me hugging Sundance as we both had a long, peaceful nap, and tell this story as a testament to her kindness.

Ten years old. At home, the sun was beginning to set, sending streaks of pink, gold, and purple gliding across the sky. The dusk was lukewarm, pleasant enough for me to wander outside to the garden in my backyard with my mom. There my mom noticed a small, chirping bird, so small it could fit into my palm, as I later discovered. The fact that it was a baby was abundantly clear as soon as we spotted it.

About ten minutes later, I was sitting on the wooden steps that led to the garden with the small creature in the palm of my left hand, watching over it to make sure that it was safe for the time being. My mom was scrounging up a cardboard box to serve as a nest in order to protect the chick

for the time being. The tiny bird was trembling, possibly out of entirely understandable fear, but past the trembling, through the bird's miniscule chest, I could feel its heart drumming. That such a small being could contain such vibrant life shocked me, and I stayed with the bird for a while longer, occasionally running a single finger over its downy blue feathers and whispering quietly to it. If a stranger saw me, they might have cast sharp glances, believing that I was a senile young girl talking to herself, but that was not the case. The young fledgling had unknowingly taught me that life connects trillions of organisms across continents, and that life is stronger and more flexible than a spider's sticky web.

Fourteen years old. It was the time of the infamous Australian wildfires, crushing entire forests in its gaping maw of greed. Several younger students at my school had taken it upon themselves to organize a bake sale, with all proceeds going towards the fight to bring the fires to a standstill. As the students announced the bake sale, images of fleeing, terrified animals were projected behind them, bathed in the choking grasp of smoke. As a koala was pictured, I remembered "ooing" and "aahing" at one in a zoo in Sydney. Would that koala have suffered the same fate as the one in the picture if it had not been under human care? I abruptly found myself recalling all the animals that had snuggled themselves into my past. Tommy, Sundance, the baby bird, Zuri, a lost black dog, Ginger, a pair of bunnies, a wallaby, a kangaroo and her mother, several shimmering fish at a friend's house, a pod of dolphins in San Diego, the flock of ducks at a park I liked to frequent, a magnificent turkey vulture, a black-masked raccoon, and even the squirrels, crows, and occasional lizard that had made their homes in my neighborhood . . . if they were (somewhat literally) under fire, what course of action would I take? Would I become a firefighter, helping to reign in wildfires in order to save thousands of lives? Would I volunteer at a charity, working every day to save animals from disaster? Would I join a foster care program, giving a home to as many creatures as needed? There were an infinite number of possibilities.

That day, I gave five dollars to the fight against the fires. And then I convinced my friends to do the same. It was the least I could do.

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