

I am a female biped

By Mary Ellen Rooney



I am a female biped and I live on a peninsula with my two cubs. I take care of their needs and I write down what I see. Yesterday I rubbed up against a nice big male biped. It felt good. But that happens less often in wintertime than it does in the summer, for our peninsula is a resort where many bipeds come from the city to be near the sea. In winter we are left to ourselves. It is an extreme way of life and I am not sure which season is better. Summers can be confusing and exhausting and winters are long and sad.

For the most part though I would say that life here is blessed and fortunate. Both cubs are well formed, the vegetation is rich and the air from the sea is healing.

I think that the best a mother can do for her progeny is teach them to master their physical world as early as possible. There is always danger about and no telling when they might need to fend for themselves. So my cubs can acquire their own food and decide what they will need for the weather before leaving the cave each day.

My complaints with them are quite minor for they both have good hearts. The older one spends too much time laying on his back and thinking when he could be moving boulders from the cave for his mother; the younger one who is very active but not strong enough to move boulders, leaves his section of the cave in a constant state of siege.

Both cubs have pets of their own. In their case, gray cats, which is unusual for male bipeds, but nonetheless the way it has worked out. The cats were strays and came to their respective masters as infants. I try to insist that the care and feeding of the cats is cubs' responsibility but it doesn't always work out that way which makes me angry. However, I am glad to have the cats with us. Their breathing and thick fur is a comfort and helps to keep the cave warm in the cold season.

The father biped left some time ago because after the cubs were born he discovered he was more of a solitary biped than a social biped. In some ways I am very sorry about his leaving because his arms were long and he could reach easily for high things. But, in another way, I am not sorry that he has gone because it is very lonely to live with someone who wants to be solitary all of the time. In a way, it is lonelier that way than it is to really alone, although as far as I am concerned, neither way is good because I miss having someone to tell things to. And sometimes, at night, when it is very windy outside, I keep waking up because I am afraid.

There's nothing to be afraid of, really. I am safe and everyone has had enough to eat, but still, I am afraid, at night when the wind is strong. I want to curl up with the cubs, but they don't like that, so I live with being afraid of "nothing," late at night, when it is windy.

On those nights I am sure I have built my bed too high, and I imagine ways to lower it to be snuggler. But I never do.

One night recently, it was so windy outside that I became convinced that I was sleeping on top of an airplane wing. I was very frightened that night, so much so that I began to pray, which did some

good. At least it passed the time until light broke and I could see clearly that I was not sleeping on top of an airplane wing. The praying helps but still I don't have any one to tell things to. And so, I have taken to writing down what I see. Seeing the words on white paper helps more than sending words to an invisible God in the dark of night. It doesn't take the place of telling someone but I find that the more I do it, the better I get, which brings me pleasure. In a way it is like praying and at times it has been known to rebuke the wind.

This morning as I was walking on the long north road that leads to a castle on a hilltop that looks all the way to the sea, I saw five white doves. I have often seen gray doves, but never before white ones. They were a startling sight with their tail feathers fluffed behind them in the shape of horseshoes, or crowns. I wanted to tell someone about the doves, so I wrote it down. I thought perhaps they were a sign of peace.

Because I am alone so much of the time, I frequently become self-centered and think all signs are for me and so I thought the five white doves might signify that I shall have peace in my life. One dove would have been uplifting but five were actually encouraging so I continued with the walk a little happier than when I set out. Maybe the white doves were the result of my praying on those dark and windy nights. It didn't matter, as long as I felt happier, which I did.

Next, on my way to the castle, I passed a farm where there is a watering hole for cattle. Just beyond, to the east, a flock of Canada Geese honked loudly as they came in for a landing as they came into the potato field for a landing. The eastern end of the peninsula where we live is a special flyway where for as long as I can remember these birds have flown each fall on their way south. No one has quite reasoned why this flyway is where it is and, even more mystifying, is how the birds find their way to the same potato field each year.

I stopped next to the water hole where the cattle were drinking and chewed on a Brussels sprout that I had picked from the spiny stalk in the farmer's garden. When we lived in the city, I thought Brussels sprouts grew in baskets. The geese signaled each other in a garbled and noisy language. One goose appeared to head the flock. I guess they were

investigating the field's safety. Geese have their problems, I thought.

They too must teach their young to deal with adversity.

I guess that geese have been born with an imprint on their brains of the stars that they will need for navigation. Scientists discovered that possibility by bringing a flock into a planetarium once. First the geese flew around the gigantic building, frenzied to be indoors, but eventually the acclimated themselves to the star patterns on the ceiling of the planetarium.

I wonder if we bipeds might not also have been born with star patterns imprinted on our brains. Perhaps that is the way we too find our way. For example, now and then I find myself moving in an unintended way into experiences that alter my own course significantly. Just last week I picked some Brussels sprouts from the farmer's garden and walked in the opposite direction to the cave where an older female biped lives. I don't normally visit her. As a matter of fact, we aren't even friends. Nonetheless I did this unusual thing and dropped by to bring her Brussels sprouts.

She invited me for herb tea and we talked. She spoke of the days when she too had raised cubs alone, five of them. She said they were gone now, that time had just slipped away and she had never felt herself getting old but now she was sixty-five and tending the cave was more boring and difficult than ever. Prices were rising and her work was no longer needed in the world.

After that morning I began to think about other plans for my own life. I began to think less about the cubs and more about myself. I do not want to arrive at her predicament. Did my star system lead me to pick Brussels sprouts for her that morning?

It is also true that Canada Geese mate for life. This is not the case for bipeds. Our lives are not that simple. We have flaws that make mating for life difficult. Perhaps it is because we believe we are more important than is really true. The geese from Canada live in flocks, partially because it is easier to travel that way and the long flights are less lonely when there is company. Also, in a flock, everyone is important but no one being is the most important of all. For example, during the migration, the goose at the apex is not the leader of the flock, nor is it the navigator as one might

assume. It is only a temporary job that involves breaking the air currents so the rest of the flock can travel with less effort. That is why they fly in V formation. When the head goose becomes tired, another takes over, and so it goes until each has a turn. Bipedes could learn from that system.

Walking outside, under the sky, is good for the habit of observing other creatures in the universe, and sometimes I need not stray far from the cave to find natural miracles. There are often small creatures nearby and recently I became related to a plant.

It all happened this fall after I returned from visiting another peninsula. I had gone there to write down what I saw, in tranquility away from the hordes of visiting summer bipeds. Although it was peaceful to be in a place where I had only my own few things to keep track of, and myself to feed, in the end I was sick with missing the cubs. Our reunion was a happy time of sharing our adventures. The cubs especially liked the photograph of me in a hang glider, which they placed in the kitchen when we moved back into the cave which had been rented for the summer.

On the south side of the cave a homecoming surprise awaited us. There, growing happily near the back door was a huge pumpkin vine. It was more than huge. It was gigantic! Both cubs were astonished too. They swore that had not secretly been planting pumpkin seeds in the soil while I was away. "Not me," said the older. "Me neither," said the younger. And thus we deduced the pumpkin was a gift.

Each morning I looked forward to seeing how much it had grown in the night. It was growing so fast that I finally had to put a fence around it for protection when the cubs played football.

One night while I slept the tentacles from the plant hungrily wrapped themselves around the fence, dragging it across the grass. That pumpkin plant has confidence and clarity, I thought. Finally a bee came by and pollinated one of its great flowers. I planned a great harvest for pie and Jack-o-lanterns on Halloween, which is also my birthday.

Then a strange thing happened. I began to notice that my mystery plant differed from the pumpkin vines that grew along the north road where I walked in the mornings. Although the farmer's plants appeared smaller than our plant, it was also true that they were coming to fruit sooner. I decided that our plant was a unique late bloomer.

Finally all the blossoms fell from the vine except for one fruit that is still growing and, although it is nearly Halloween, it is still green. Perhaps that is the way it is with late bloomers. There are fewer fruits to harvest. Perhaps that is because later in fall growth slows down. Nonetheless, I will settle for the one enormous fruit. And if this one decides to turn orange on my birthday I shall immediately register for a course in celestial navigation.

Of course, I know that I shall never understand these mysteries, probably because the instrument I have to solve puzzles with is not exactly like the one that makes up the mysteries, which to it are not inscrutable at all. Yet it seems to be built into my own bipedal nature that it is always observing enigmas. It is a bewildering riddle and I think that what I shall do is write down what I see and leave it there.