

LETTER FROM THE EDITOR

Jillian Jimenez, Ph.D.

In this issue of *Reflections* our relationship with our animal kin and the bonds we develop with them is explored with intelligence, wit, and touching honesty. Reframing the concept of “pet”—a social fiction that animals exist for our use and pleasure—these authors emphasize the reciprocity of the human animal and non human animal bond. Animals shape our thoughts, dreams, and culture from childhood onward. As children we learn most things about the world around us by filtering them through our understanding of our animal kin. Animals are deeply implicated in human development. As Paul Shepard, renowned naturalist noted, “There is a profound, inescapable need for animals that is in all people everywhere, an urgent requirement for which no substitute exists. It is as hard and unavoidable as the compounds of our inner chemistry.”¹ Animals are the earliest inhabitants of the mind’s eye; they are essential to the development of both speech and thought.

As human animals, we have evolved in the midst of our animal kin and our intelligence has been nurtured by theirs, as prey, adversaries, guides, sentinels, and finally as companions. Our similarities to all other animals overwhelm our differences from them, which exist primarily in our own unrealistic and narcissistic claims about superiority over the natural world. Animals remain emblematic of our relationship with the wildness of the natural world throughout our lives. As mediators between the thinking animals and the wildness of nature, companion animals may seem to comply with their assigned roles, but they represent an untamed natural world and may be the only vestiges of that world for many of us. The undeniable physicality of animals evokes an awareness of our oneness with our bodies, just as their shorter life spans teach us

about grief and prepares us for other inevitable goodbyes. These narratives remind us, in many different ways, of our interdependence with animals and their transcendence in our lives, over and above the social construct of “pet.” They allow us to maintain a deep connection to the wildness from which we all emerged.

Reflections thanks Marilyn Potts for developing this issue and working with the authors who crafted narratives of commitment, passion, and courage as they told stories of their deep relationships with their animal kin. Marilyn Potts is a nationally known scholar and expert on distance education, as well as a dedicated friend to animals. This issue was a labor of love for her, and I want to thank her for her integrity and commitment to the well being of all animals.

¹ *Thinking Animals*. New York: Viking Press, 1978, p. 2



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