



# TattleTails & Tidbits



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## The Colors of Gratitude and Hope

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It is hard to believe that this is our Autumn issue already. As we put together this fall issue, we are only seeing a few trees starting to show some color, as it is a bit early yet. The photo above was taken in our garden last fall.

Nothing beats the cooler air, the smell of apples falling from the trees, and the smell of dazzling colored leaves. It is as if something magic is happening. And magic it is! It is a time to harvest the bounty of fruits and vegetables that the spring seeds have produced. And, yes, it is a time to prepare for the winter ahead.

As the days grow shorter and the list of things to do grows longer, it seems that autumn always flies by. It is a time to be grateful for all the Earth has produced. It is a signal that a period of rest is soon to come. A time to sit and reflect and breathe. (Although on the farm, for us humans, winter does not bring more periods of rest!)

The animals seem to understand this while we humans still run around in a hustle and bustle to get things done. But nature knows how to stop, reflect in gratitude, and rest and recharge. The colors should be signaling us to take some time to look within with gratitude and with hope of all that is ahead still to come.

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# Spring Farm's Favorite Ghost

by Bonnie Reynolds

**B**onnie is the 6th generation of her family here on Spring Farm. A brilliant highlight in family history was the Holstein-Friesian dairy farm run from 1903-1935 by Bonnie's grandfather, Francis Merritt Jones. His cows held world records for the butterfat content of their milk. His bulls were prized sires – cows arrived in box cars from as far away as California to be bred to Spring Farm bulls. Each young Spring Farm heifer or bull was worth thousands. Buyers came from as far away as Argentina and New Zealand.

Francis lost it all during The Depression. Bonnie grew up on stories of her grandfather's triumphs and tragedies. She also suffered from a secret guilt, that she had not been born the boy that Francis had hoped for – a boy who would carry on with dairy farming and hopefully restore Spring Farm's glory.

Francis loved his farm passionately – the very earth, his darling bovine girls and boys, and also his horses -- work horses, carriage horses and riding horses in the years before newfangled machines such as tractors and autos came into use.

It should be no surprise, then, that Francis would take keen interest in the manner in which that disappointing girl, Bonnie, was restoring, in a totally new way, but still with lots of horses, success and fame for his beloved Spring Farm.

He first made his presence known the day that Bonnie, Dawn, and Bonnie's mother Deanie were trying to move an easy chair up the staircase in the old Jones homestead. That staircase, however, is narrow, and enclosed by walls on both sides. They tried and tried, turning the chair this way and that. But it kept getting stuck between the walls. It wouldn't go.

Then suddenly Dawn said, "Humor me." That was a private signal, used between Dawn and Bonnie when Dawn was receiving information from an "other-than-natural" source.

"Turn it this way," Dawn then said. "That way, Tip it to the left. Now tilt it forward ... "

Her directions were followed. And suddenly the chair easily fit up with stairs.

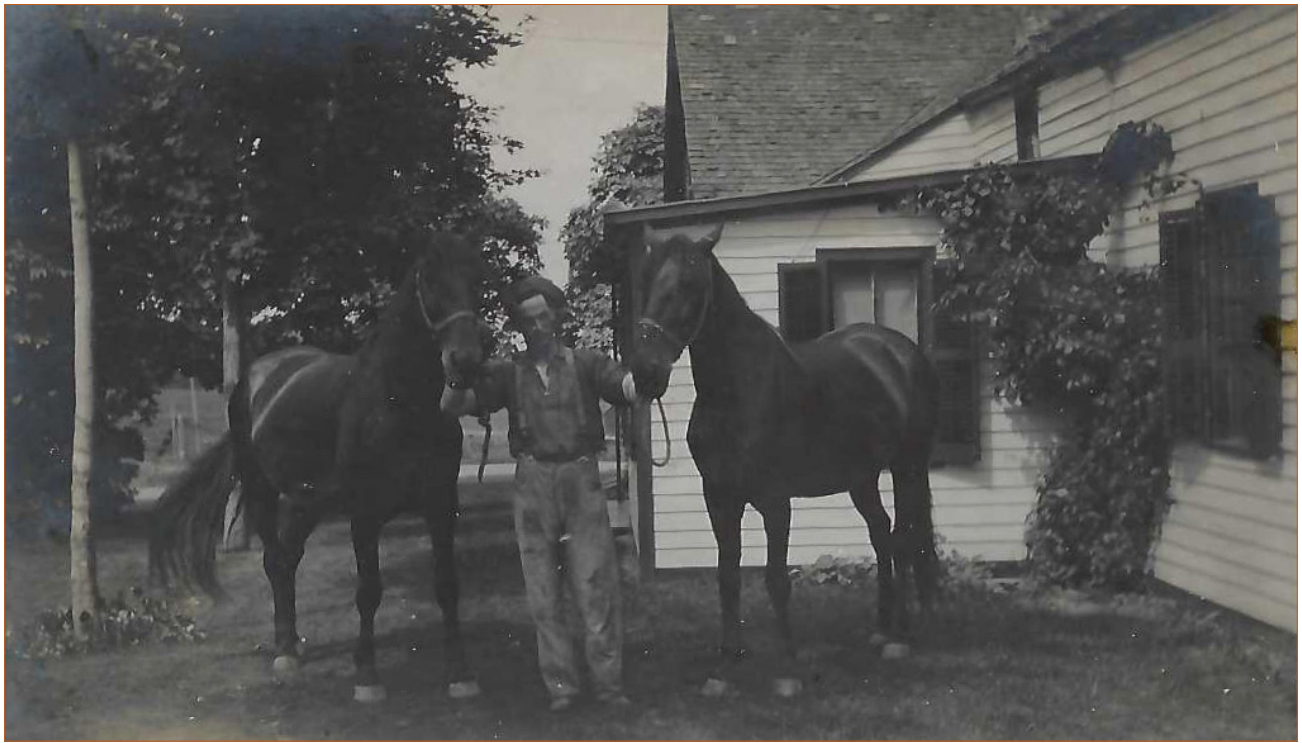
"How did you know what to do?!" Bonnie and Deanie cried in amazement.

"I don't know. I just suddenly smelled pipe tobacco. Sweet pipe tobacco. I seemed to be floating in the air up above us. I looked down and I could suddenly see exactly how we had to turn the chair to get it up the stairs."

At which point it was Deanie's turn to amaze Bonnie and Dawn. "Oh. Sweet pipe tobacco. That would be Mr. Jones. Mrs. Jones would only let him smoke if the tobacco smelled sweet."

This situation, in which Grampa made his presence known, was interesting. The room to which the chair was being taken had been his and his wife's bedroom back in 1908. Bonnie's father had been born there. And the chair itself is special. It's the chair in which Francis died.

Having announced himself, Francis proceeded to, once again, make himself at home. He loved to tease Dawn at night as she topped off the horses' water buckets before bedtime. The water would stop then start again, as though someone was stepping on the hose. She would laugh and call out a greeting, at which point the water would again flow normally. While everyone on the staff was occasionally treated to the scent of sweet pipe tobacco. They took it with good nature. Often Bonnie would get a call on the walkie-talkie, with a message like, "Hey Bonnie, your grandfather is down here in the tack room. Any message for him?"



*Francis with two of his beauties circa 1900. "Coincidentally," he is wearing overalls and a straw hat!*

And one evening he was actually seen. An employee was serving final chips of hay to the horses in the arena when he saw a man, wearing overalls and a well-worn straw hat, moving from stall to stall, admiring horses. Assuming that a neighboring farmer had wandered in, the employee was about to call out that he would be closing up for the night in just a few minutes when ... the man just disappeared.

That employee was not frightened. Rather, he was delighted, happy to tell all of us the next day that he had been privileged to see Grampa's ghost.

Grampa, we have discovered, is not our only haunt here at Spring Farm. But they are all family -- friendly, playful, and protective. It's actually comforting to know that they are around.

While, for Bonnie, there is special pleasure, knowing how happy Francis is to again be able to watch over his beloved Spring Farm, to see it carrying on into the 21st Century -- with, surely, a different dream than his own had been, but a wonderful dream no less.

It wasn't a boy that had been needed. Only some people -- girls actually -- besides Bonnie there are Dawn and Margot, and now Peg -- who love Spring Farm the way that Francis Merritt Jones loves it.

# Lessons From The Animal Teachers - Every Life Has A Purpose

by Dawn E. Hayman

Someone recently asked me what was one of the most profound messages that I have received from animals in the last 35 years. I had never been asked that question before. At first, I thought it was impossible to answer, as there have been so many incredible messages over the decades of listening and sharing with many thousands of animals, and it would be impossible to choose just one. But as I sat there and dropped into my heart, a most profound answer came.

Every single life has a purpose.

As humans, we often overlook or forget that simple but profound fact. Every life, no matter how large or small, whether it walks, or crawls, or flies, or stands as sentient as a tree, or as still as a carpet of grass, or is what we consider to be a weed. Every life has a purpose. And that purpose might not be obvious to us. It may not even occur to us that there would be a purpose. It is nevertheless a fundamental truth of life.

We live in a throwaway society. If it doesn't suit us, toss it. If it doesn't live up to our expectations, toss it out and get something else. Sadly, animals are often the recipients of this way of thinking as well. I could go on for pages and pages with stories that we see in rescue and sanctuary work. But I'm not going to do that.

Because when I was asked the question – what is the most profound message I have received – I actually went not to my perception of things, but to the animals. What have the animals shared with me?

Animals, by their very nature, are non-judgmental, tolerant, and unconditionally loving beings. You've no doubt experienced this yourselves with your own animals. So I'm often asked, why can't humans be as loving as animals? And that brings me squarely to the answer to the original question.

The most profound thing I have learned from animals is that humans by their very nature are also compassionate, loving beings. And every single human being has a purpose. We are as capable as animals of unconditional love, tolerance, kindness, and compassion. Animals see us through a lens of love. It is we humans who have strayed away from who we really are. Many have forgotten that we even have a purpose. And many of us are struggling to figure out what that purpose is. The animals are trying to help us find our way back. Often through their love for us, we find the greatest love we have known. We trust them with our hearts because they are pure with their love.

Animals and nature never have separated themselves out from humans. They do not look at humans as being the scum of the Earth. Ah, but I just felt a bunch of you readers say.... "but they should."

The remarkable thing is that they don't. And they don't because they are lovingly trying to hold space for us to come back to our very nature. It is humans who have separated themselves out from nature and the animals. But so many human hearts are waking up to this. We are coming back to our hearts and the wonder all around us. We are feeling connection and finding our purpose again.

To **be** compassionate, loving beings, one needs to first understand that we **can** be compassionate, loving beings and then actively **choose to be** that way. The animals have not been dissuaded by others around them to think or be someone they are not. Animals understand how to be themselves and to be present in each moment. That is, after all, the natural way to be.



And, yes, animals suffer greatly when humans expect them to be a certain way or to perform to an expected level, and they can't measure up to that human's expectation. They are painfully aware of their fate when they fall short.

But even with that, they never, ever, stop being the loving beings who they are. You can step into our sanctuary and meet animals who have been betrayed, discarded, and dismissed as "useless." But you will be welcomed by each of them with open hearts. They still love. They still give of themselves. They are still kind. They are pure inspiration.

And they ask us, their human caretakers, to not be angry or hate on their behalf. One pony named Sugar once said to me, "If I don't hate them then how dare you hate them on my behalf. I am not asking you to do that. In fact, I kindly ask that you rise above that."

And that is the most profound message I have received and been gifted with over and over again in the past 35 years.

Humans have an endless capacity to love and to be kind and compassionate. It is the very nature of the human heart. We just need to remember and step into who we are.



*Sugar (1970-1994)  
Pencil drawing by Lucie LeClerc*

"If I don't hate them,  
then how dare you hate them on my behalf.

I am not asking you to do that.

In fact, I kindly ask that you rise above that."

----- Sugar

# The Nighthawk

by Matt Perry



The name “Nightjar” sounds like an object you might keep on a nightstand to hold jewelry, but it’s the name of a family of nocturnal, insect-eating birds. The placid sounding “Nightjar” is synonymous with the family’s alternate name, “Goatsucker”. That even stranger name derives from an old misapprehension which cast these birds as milk-robbers. The birds were thought to descend on goats at night to drink their milk. Apparently, farmers of old blamed their low milk yield on the creatures that just happened to be swooping around their pastures by night.

As it happens, the nightjars’ wide, scoop-like mouths are designed for taking moths and other insects out of the air and not for suckling goats. In recent times, our region’s two native Nightjars, the Whip-poor-will and the Common Nighthawk, have become quite rare. Gravel rooftops in cities once made attractive nesting sites for Nighthawks. However, in recent decades, virtually all the gravel roofing was replaced with synthetic materials, and Nighthawks were forced to abandon their

urban refuges. This loss of habitat has contributed to the species’ population decline, which by some estimates is as high as 50 % over the last 50 years.

While the Whip-poor-will is strictly a denizen of rural landscapes, the Common Nighthawk tends to be more of an urbanite. Looking somewhat like a cross between a falcon and a boomerang, the Nighthawk has long, narrow, and pointed wings. A prominent white stripe bisecting their primary wing feathers is a distinctive field mark if you happen to see one during the day. Their flight is swift, erratic, and bat-like, as they scoop flying insects out of the air. Sometimes they can be seen darting around streetlights at night, harvesting insects drawn to the lights. One evening several years ago, a Nighthawk was seen hunting insects around a light over Spring Farm’s parking lot. We were just returning from a late day tour of the sanctuary and were treated to the rare site of one in action. The encounter was brief, as it usually is with Nightjars, but several in our party got to see a species they didn’t previously know existed.

The sounds produced by the Nighthawk are far more innocuous than those made by the Whip-poor-will. While the Whip-poor-will produces a loud repetitive whistled song (“whip-poor-will, whip-poor-will, ....”), the Nighthawk makes an understated, nasal sounding “peent” vocalization. They also produce a “woosh” or “boom” sound with their wings when pulling out of a display dive. One July evening, while monitoring our Peregrine Falcon nest in Downtown Utica, I heard call notes of a single Nighthawk flying overhead. The calls weren’t loud, but they were distinctive. Interestingly, the frequency of the call managed to punch through the persistent city traffic noise. After about a minute I was able to put my binoculars on the bird. Flying by a Peregrine nest isn’t the wisest move for any bird, and I was glad the Peregrines didn’t attack him. Nighthawks may be highly maneuverable, but they are unlikely to escape the clutches of a determined falcon.

Dependent on the presence of flying insects, the species is unable to survive a northern winter. In late August and September, the Nighthawk abandons its nocturnal lifestyle and begins a southward migration journey to the tropics. It’s during spring and fall migration when they can sometimes be seen flying over creeks, rivers, and other water bodies. We don’t often see them at the nature sanctuary but on an afternoon in late August of last year, one was seen flying back and forth over one of the beaver ponds. His flight was erratic and quick as he gleaned insects from the air with his bill.

A few years ago, I had another daytime encounter with a Nighthawk. This one was roosting on a hawthorn branch at a creek crossing over a foot trail. He was at head level and didn't stir even when I inadvertently got within a few feet of him. When perched, his cryptic plumage and relatively wide head made him look like a cross between a grouse and an owl.

Seeing Nighthawks is a challenge these days. However, if you're determined to find one, your best chance is to stake out a river or large creek during late August or early September and watch for them migrating through. Or you might just inadvertently see one hunting by night in the glow of a streetlamp.



## Featured Animals From Our Sanctuary - Blind But Joyful

by Dawn E. Hayman

**M**erlin is an African Grey Parrot who came to us in 1994 around the age of 12. Merlin is now over 40 years old. While African Greys can live from 40-60 years, Merlin is considered a senior parrot. He is a key character on this farm. He is the animal who has lived here the longest. In fact, other than Bonnie and Dawn, he is the longest lived resident on the farm.

Merlin has a lot to say and his vocabulary and list of sound effects continue to grow. He is constantly amazing us with what he says and all that he can imitate. Late one night, he had Bonnie and Dawn searching the place as a smoke detector kept beeping as if the batteries were going dead. They ran around from one detector to the next, unable to determine which one was beeping. After about 20 minutes of this, Dawn suddenly stopped in her tracks and said to Bonnie - "It's Merlin!" He looked all innocent for a moment and then let out a whistle of pure joy. He got us!

Merlin spent all his years with us being able to go in and out of his cage during the day and then sleeping in his cage at night. He could fly in his room which became an aviary and place of mischief for him. He can be quite the rascal and would walk on the floor and come up to a sleeping cat and gently pick the cat's tail up in his beak only to have the cat wake up to the shock of Merlin holding it's tail. He is a pacifist and has peacefully co-existed with several species of animals. He even would call our dogs by name and by their individual whistle

## Merlin African Grey Parrot



*(continued next page)*



that we had for each of them.

Over the past two years, Merlin developed cataracts and has gradually gone blind. He no longer feels safe outside of his cage and we have set up his cage with his food and toys where he likes them. While his life looks different, he is still finding enjoyment and is still regaling us with his funny voices, phrases, and sounds. He continues to add to his vocabulary and sound effects all the time.

Merlin is an amazing being. His intelligence is obvious to all around him. But he is also one of the most empathetic beings on the farm. He has never screamed or made sounds to be annoying. He truly loves to entertain. And during very stressful or emotional times, he stands by quietly taking everything in and supporting all around him any way he can. We continue to be blessed by this magnificent soul in a bird body.



## Molly Welch Pony mix

**M**olly is a Welch Pony mix who was born around 1997. She came to the farm in 2010. Her career as a hunter/jumper show pony was cut short when she suddenly lost her eyesight. Molly is functionally blind, meaning she totally trusts and relies on her human handler to move about like a normal horse. In fact, she was even being ridden by children up until 3 weeks before she came to retire here at Spring Farm.

Molly had a rough transition when she first came here. Not only was she now blind, but she also was suddenly without a job. She had been a career show pony and that was her entire

life. To be in retirement at only age 13 was not even anything she could comprehend. She was in a new place with new people caring for her and her life had abruptly and totally turned upside down. Yet, sweet Molly trusted us and the horses who became her new family and kept communicating to her that she was safe. It took a while but Molly believed them and now has settled in beautifully to life in retirement at Spring Farm. Molly is a highly functioning blind pony and navigates her world outside in her paddock as well as in our indoor arena very well.

In 2019, the eye disease that had long ago taken Molly's vision had progressed to a point where those non-functioning eyes became very painful. We made the decision with our veterinarians that it would be way easier on her (especially as she did not have any vision at all by then) to remove her eyes. This made an immediate difference in her quality of life as now she could live without any pain in her eyes. Since then, Molly has been very comfortable and still amazes us by what she can see and do without her eyes.

Molly found a whole new life being here. What at the onset seemed to her to be a tragedy, ended up being a life she truly is grateful for and treasures. And she lets us know this all the time. To see and experience the peace that is so evident from Molly as she amazingly navigates through her surroundings is truly an inspiration. She is confident and settled and has found a new purpose in her life.

In Molly's own words: "When I lost my eyesight, I thought my life was over. And for many horses that is true. But I am very lucky. I was able to rewrite my own story within the safety of this farm. And what a wonderful story it is. I don't have to win any ribbons to be a champ. I've never really even seen what this farm looks like or what my friends look like. But I know what it feels like. And I love them all."