

Rev. Kim K. Crawford Harvie
 Arlington Street Church
 3 October, 2010

Love Dogs

*One night a man was crying,
 Allah! Allah!
 His lips grew sweet with the praising,
 until a cynic said,
 “So! I have heard you
 calling out, but have you ever
 gotten any response?”*

*The man had no answer to that.
 He quit praying and fell into a confused sleep.*

*He dreamed he saw Khidr,¹ the guide of souls,
 in a thick, green foliage.
 “Why did you stop praising?” [he asked]
 “Because I’ve never heard anything back.”*

[Khidr, the guide of souls, spoke:]
 This longing you express
 is the return message.

The grief you cry out from
 draws you toward union.

Your pure sadness that wants help
 is the secret cup.

Listen to the moan of a dog for its master.
 That whining is the connection.

There are love dogs

¹ possibly pronounced KY-derr

no one knows the names of.

Give your life
to be one of them.²

That's our friend Rumi, the 13th century Persian Sufi mystic: *Give your life to be a love dog*.

George Thorndike Angell was born in 1823. Perhaps because of a childhood in poverty, he had deep convictions about social change. He was already well known for his fourteen year partnership with the antislavery activist Samuel E. Sewall when, one day in March of 1868, two horses, each carrying two riders over forty miles of rough road, were raced until they both dropped dead. George Angell was appalled.

He penned a letter of protest that appeared in the Boston Daily Advertiser, “where it caught the attention of Emily Appleton, a prominent Bostonian who deeply loved animals and was already nurturing the first stirrings of an American anticruelty movement. Within a month, with Emily Appleton's backing, George Angell incorporated the MSPCA: Massachusetts Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals.

“A mere twelve weeks after the deadly race, [he] achieved passage of the [commonwealth's] first anticruelty laws.” The next month, the first periodical dedicated to animal welfare was in print – “to speak for those who cannot speak for themselves” – and over two hundred thousand copies were distributed, twenty five thousand of them by Boston policemen, helping to raise awareness of animal cruelty.³ One of the great social reform movements was born out of the broken, open heart of one man, one angel: George Angell. *Give you life to be a love dog*.

Compassion is a special blend of understanding and sympathy, awakened by the awareness of someone else's pain. “More vigorous than empathy, [compassion inspires us to end suffering. And it] is often ... the key component in ... altruism.”⁴ Closely related to compassion is kindness: literally, the recognition that we are all of one kind, all kin to one another. The question that surfaces over and over is whether compassion can be taught. According to studies cited by the Humane Society, there is bad news and good news, but the winner is *yes*. Compassion can be learned ... and animals are great

2 Jalal al-Din Rumi, “Love Dogs,” in *The Essential Rumi*, trans. Coleman Barks with John Moyne

3 Please see mspca.convio.net/site/PageServer?pagename=aboutus_History_George_Thorndike_Angell

4 Please see wordnetweb.princeton.edu/perl/webwn and en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Compassion

teachers.

The bad news is that there is a direct correlation between cruelty to animals and violence toward human beings. In roughly a third of families suffering from domestic violence, at least one child has hurt or killed a pet. Children who commit animal cruelty have usually witnessed or been victims of abuse. Adults who deliberately abuse animals are five times more likely to commit violent crimes against people, four times more likely to commit property crimes, and three times more likely to have been arrested for drug abuse or disorderly conduct than those who don't. The FBI actually uses reports of animal cruelty to assess the potential threat posed by suspected violent criminals.

The good news is that intervening in this cycle of violence is very simple. I commend you to the Humane Society's "Humane Education." Designed for children, it teaches about animals and kindness to all beings. The result is a lessening of violence, and an increase in moral character, a sense of responsibility, and empowerment.⁵ We can teach our children, *Give your life to be a love dog*.

Or a love pig.

After they lost their Oregon farm, Collin and Deb Stolpes packed everything they could into their 40-passenger bus, and drove away without looking back. Collin teetered between rage and despair.

A litter of pigs had been born just two days earlier; Deb couldn't bear to leave them all behind. A few hours into the ride, Deb took from its hiding place a tiny black and white piglet. Collin was horrified; what were they going to do with a pig? There wasn't much he could do. Deb named her Snort.

Soon, Snort was thirty pounds. Deb cut ear holes in Collin's baseball cap for her, and painted her hoofs with pink nail polish. She also convinced Collin to fashion a little door at the front of the bus, so Snort could let herself out. Collin added a ramp, which he called Snort's speedway. For four months, the threesome camped, fished, and drifted.

On a windy, sub-zero night, they parked in Collin's sister Claudia's driveway in Aurora, Colorado. In an effort to warm up the bus, Collin pulled up the Snort's speedway and shut the little door, closed the windows, and turned on the propane heater.

The humans slept, but Snort did not. She rooted around in her bed. She raced

⁵ Katherine Noyes, *The Challenge*, "Teach Children to be Kind to Animals." Please see charityguide.org/volunteer/fewhours/kind-to-animals.htm

up and down the aisle of the bus. And finally, she oinked so loudly that Deb got up to let her out.

Out on the lawn, Snort calmed down, though all she did was wander around, aimlessly. Puzzled, Deb picked her up, brought her back inside, and went back to bed. Immediately, Snort was agitated again. She heaved her portly body around, snorting and oinking wildly. Again, Deb took her out. Again, nothing.

Back inside, back to bed ... and Snort was squealing relentlessly. Deb, out of tricks and very sleepy, shook Collin to wake him. “You take her out this time.”

Only Collin wouldn't wake up. Deb's voice got louder, and more insistent. Finally, Collin was able to gasp that he could barely breathe; he thought he was having a heart attack. Meanwhile, Snort was going crazy.

Deb let herself into her sister-in-law's house, but when she tried to dial 911, she couldn't feel her fingers.

Claudia and Deb got Collin out of the bus, and then to the hospital. You know what was wrong: the propane tank was leaking, and carbon monoxide was slowly poisoning the little family. Snort, close to the ground, was least affected, though “her exquisite sense of smell, refined as that of her truffle-hunting European relatives,” had enabled her to detect the potentially deadly leak. Deb, taking Snort outside, had inhaled just enough fresh air to keep from being as sick as Collin.

As Collin Stolpes recuperated, he thought about how he'd wanted to die when he lost the farm, and how grateful he was, now, to be alive. To be saved by a pig, he thought, was g*d's idea of a really good joke. He decided he would act as if he were alive for a reason. He didn't know the reason, yet, but he vowed to stop nursing his anger, and trade in his sadness for gratitude.⁶

My spiritual companions,

“...This longing you express
is the return message.

The grief you cry out from
draws you toward union.

6 Kristin von Kreisler and Jeffrey Moussaieff Masson, *The Compassion of Animals: True Stories of Animal Courage*, pp. 1-6

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