

My Little Feathered Friend

By Jackie Layne Partin

This week in March 2011, my husband has been going full steam ahead on building more little brooding houses for the many bluebirds that flit around this old farm. We have lived here about twenty-two years, and the breezes have never been without the songs of the bluebirds. I can recognize their “tweets” from all the other birds’ efforts at songs. One might say I have had a little experience with these beautiful creatures of God.

In 1982 we moved back to Grundy County for all kinds of reasons, and I made it clear that unless my government, some foreign government, or my Lord decided I should be here no longer that I was here to stay. I had seen enough of the world and had found nothing to compare with the hills of Tennessee. The move was not all joy and happiness for every member of the family, and times were not easy for us, but my feet were planted firmly on the sandy, loamy soil of Grundy County.

We had moved a house trailer onto land that we had owned at Littell Lake since 1961, and on the front of the home, which was facing the lake, we built a glassed-in porch with a little wooden deck attached to that. It was a beautiful day, a quiet peaceful day. My soul for some years had been wrestling with negative notions, but that day, all was well with my soul as I sat on the little deck and watched the breeze cause the needles on the huge pines near the lake to slowly sway as though music was in the air. That’s when we met, that wonderful male bluebird and I.

He had an attraction for one of the glass windows on the porch. Continuously he made his flight to the window, stopped for a rest, and sang his melody. Each time he rested, I talked to him with words of endearment. He acknowledged my presence but didn’t seem at all bothered. Repeating the same words in the same tone to him each time he lit on the window, I noticed that he never failed to answer me. I studied him as one would the tiny body of a new born son or daughter--his colors and their placement, his skinny legs, his eyes, his songs and his willingness to fellowship me, to be my friend.

Going on with every day chores, I forgot about my feathered friend until the next day when once again he showed interest in a window but on the other side of the trailer. I stepped outside the kitchen door which went out on that side and softly spoke the same words as I had the day before. His answers came rolling out to the point that I could not decide which of us was the more talkative. I loved his loving me. My previous experience with our feathered friends involved the less graceful fowls, robins, chickens, crows, and great-horned owls. I had had relationship experiences with all of those, but this little bird was tender, kind, pleasant and loving. Again my presence did not frighten him away;

instead he seemed to be telling or asking me something. I went into the kitchen where I had ground beef thawing and formed some tiny little balls which were placed on a rotting stump near that window. He came and took some of the meat with him.

In that kitchen was a bay window with a shelf running along inside of it. I opened one of the windows and removed the screen giving just enough room for him to enter and retrieve food should he want to become more familiar with me, his new found friend. I placed seeds, berries and tiny bits of meat on a piece of waxed paper and included a shallow lid filled with water just in case he was thirsty. I had no idea that he would come inside for a morning chat like a housewife drinking coffee with her plumber and asking how the wife and kids were. But he did. He became an important part of my summer.

As usual, my husband had already placed bluebird boxes around the area, and my little friend was nesting in the one nearest the kitchen window. He had married, but his wife's colors were not so beautiful. When I went out to hang my laundry to dry, he and I visited having the same old conversations. He acknowledged my presence from high in a tree or as far away as the garden. He kept me informed as to his goings and comings. There was no mistaking his "words" even from the other bluebirds. He lifted my spirit. The couple set about rearing their four new babies. I kept the food in the window, and Father kept it dispersed. Mother never visited; maybe she was the jealous type. I watched the babies as they left the nest; then winter was upon us.

We never visited that winter. Maybe he had cut the apron strings and decided to find a new home. Not so, early the next spring he came back to see me, and the two of us started up where we had left off. The window was opened again, and I placed the little tidbits that he had come to enjoy on the shelf. Mother and he set up housekeeping in the same box near the grapevine and kitchen window. Little did I know that when this family of babies began to fly, Father had already made plans to introduce his children to me. He brought them to the window, but he hopped inside to fetch the tidbits for them. Then one day as I moved around the kitchen, Father allowed two of his children to come inside the kitchen window, and just like human siblings do from time to time, they began to fight. They picked at each other until they fell behind some canisters. That is when I stepped in and calmly asked them if they could "get over it" and remove themselves from my kitchen. After Father had fed them sufficiently, off they went to practice some real flying.

The greatest moment of sharing that came between me and my feathered friend was the day I walked into the kitchen and noticed some strange items arranged in a neat little pile on the spot where I always left food for him. Upon closer examination, I realized that the shoe was on the other foot now. Instead of me being the provider, he had brought me several seeds and dead bugs. I could not believe my eyes. Of course, I could not say for

certain why he had done this, but in my heart, I knew why. He was thanking me for all the times that I had made his life easier by leaving gifts for him in the window. Do birds have souls? My goodness, this little feathered creature was so kind and thoughtful. And I loved him for it.

We moved a few miles away. Leaving the lake and its serenity was nothing. Leaving a wonderful garden spot was nothing. Leaving a place we had owned since marriage was nothing, but leaving my feathered friend was everything. I knew he would be just fine, but I could not accept that he might think that I did not love him anymore, that I did not care. I would not, did not go back, ever.

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