

## It Would Be A Phoebe

 I'm not one of those crazy bird people. Yes, I currently have five bird feeders in a cottonwood tree outside my kitchen window. Apparently one must create a banquet to entice the different distinguishing palates of western avian.

I do shade my eyes and wave at any hawk, spiraling above me when I hear - what my friend refers to as the "tv western - hawk call". Recently I realized there must be a hawk per mile here in Wallowa country. I counted as I drove a ten mile section. For only two separate miles, I spied no hawk, but in the following miles, I saw two or three. And once, a bald eagle was a stand-in. I have renamed 82 - "hawk-a-mile highway."



 When living in Vermont, I was crazy enough to "caw" in the crows when taking the compost to the garden. I was a convert to the lazy woman's approach to composting. Toss it on bare ground, let the wild birds and animals eat their fill .... and eventually work the remains into the soil.

 I was crazy enough to stop the car on the side of the highway and wrap a newly deceased owl in a blanket. I tediously removed all the meat from its wings and tail and mounted them open to dry. My two, grade school boys loved that blanket. Twenty-five years later, they still haven't forgiven me.



 Being a macro photographer, I guess I was crazy enough to save most dead birds with nice feathers. Maybe that was why my now "wasband" and boys stopped eating vegetables. Frozen peas or mixed vegetables were a standard snack in our home. I am an avid believer in recycling and reuse. My boys complained every frozen vegetable bag encased a dead bird.



But I digress. On this particular morning, while weeding my Vermont garden, instead of a soothing musical bird chorus, I heard irritating chirps at regular intervals like a scratched, stuck record - if you are old enough to remember. Loud? This bird must have swallowed a megaphone.



 I hunted its source. Awwwww. It was a baby! What was it doing on the ground? How had my cats not discovered it first? I knew better than to touch a wild animal. I corralled my cats indoors and vacated the area. Now the bird parents could somehow return the bird to its nest. Hours later, it was apparent the parents knew more than I. Perhaps they deserted this projectile chirper because it would not remain silent. Perhaps it had a mental or physical condition which made survival unrealistic. Perhaps they were exhausted.

Phoebes are not showy birds. They are brownish-grey with dirty white bellies. Even the professional writers of The Cornell Lab of Ornithology give phoebes a bad rap:  
*"The Eastern Phoebe is a plump songbird with a medium-length tail. It appears large-headed for a bird of its size. The head often appears flat on top, but phoebes sometimes raise the feathers up into a peak. Like most small flycatchers, they have short, thin bills used for catching insects."*

 Phoebes have an irritating need to build their nests on sheltered flat surfaces. Their favorite building site was atop the light fixtures in the barn where we parked our car and truck. Our windshields were constantly splattered with white-wash. We tried to out-smarted the phoebes by placing upside down yogurt containers over the top of the fixtures, but they nested on the exposed beam between the vehicles. Bombing missions continued.

Phoebes often have mites. One year, their nest was near my cat's favorite siesta spot in the barn. Starbright also loved to nap in a basket of freshly washed clothes. Yes, the mites hitchhiked from the birds, to the cat, to us. I am *not* crazy about phoebes.



 Yet, I am cursed with a limbic brain. Konrad Lorenz - a Nobel prize-winner- says we are tricked by an evolutionary response to our own young which we transfer to other animal babies. There was no way I could *not* rescue that loud, messy, big headed, ball of feathers. She became Phoebe - proper name, song, genus and feminine.



 But a flycatcher! She would eat live food. No simple job of "en-cage-ment" with a bowl of seeds. No. I became a regular at the local feed and grain store, investing in feeding syringes and special baby bird food of dehydrated bug protein to be mixed with water. This, I attempted to squirt down Phoebe's throat every hour of the day. Steve, my significant other, had never witnessed my maternal limbic brain. He appeared on the scene after eons of children and chickens. He was impressed .... and promptly ordered chicks and guinea hens. Sigh.

 Phoebe was a good baby and did let me sleep in three hour shifts, most nights. Loudly, she would let me know if I had overslept. She survived and thrived. When was it time to transition to solid food? At what point does a bird leave its nest? I had never been a bird mom before. Nevertheless, I persisted. Soon, I was retrieving meal worms from my refrigerator multiple times a day. I caught what bugs I could. Phoebe ate it all.



 As she grew, I set up a screened tent, complete with tree branches, so Phoebe could adjust to outside weather while keeping the cats at bay. I would call to her, as I did the crows, when it was feeding time. She was getting the hang of flying - yet was a bit awkward. Her flying appeared to require too much effort. That limbic brain was at it again. How can one *not* love a handicapped bird?

At last, I moved Phoebe to the upstairs of the barn. There, the gable was never completed. She would be able to fly outside if she choose. The next day, she was in the tree outside the kitchen, loudly screeching for her breakfast. Every morning or when I had an especially juicy bug, I would call "phee-be, phee-be" and she would come with her distinctly cumbersome flight.



Oh, the joy of calling a wild, free bird ... and having them come. 

 One day, while upstairs vacuuming, out of the corner of my eye, I thought I saw Phoebe's bumbling flight heading toward the breakfast tree. A second later, I saw the intent, laser flash of a small hawk. I tore downstairs and out the kitchen sliding-glass door screaming, "Phee-be!" Silence. The woods were soundless. No "feed me" demand. No movement in the wood. Eventually I found her small brown-grey murdered body, dropped near her breakfast tree. Apparently my rocket stair decent and explosive exit from the house prompted the hawk to relinquish his meal.

Why do we step through a door which we know will only bring pain? I guess my limbic brain and I are crazy enough. 



Lorem Ipsum