

The Times of



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Chickadees in the Snow

One cracking morning of this extreme winter, wherein the temperatures have hammered up and down, piston like, in a tight place between negative-double-digit nights and sparkling single-digit days, with occasional festive reprieves in the low teens, I experienced a wonderful warm spot: I finally managed to get the chickadees in our yard to feed from my hand. For months I'd been planting myself in their paths, handful of sunflower seeds raised, stoic and stone like and feeling slightly ridiculous, like a statue of a person famous for saying, "I do believe it may rain!" or a Liberty without a torch--shined on, swooped around, spurned, teased, and *dee-dee-dee ID'd* as a possible danger.

All this after years of service as the angel who fills their feeders and suet cages; of having them occasionally land so close--on a knee or the toe of my boot or the arm of my chair; of marveling at their curiosity and comfort level with humans, famously more than any other wild bird; and doling out unconditional love one sunrise march to the feeder at a time. It was hard not feel misunderstood.

The thrill, when finally the first chickadee alighted on my palm, was like the coming true of a childhood fantasy, the kind vividly dreamed from musty ground level in the woods while, say, searching for tiny tree spirits at their lunch in a miniature forest of princess pine and also expecting at any moment to meet a talking

baby raccoon; or as if the touch of the little bird gave me, for those few seconds, the power to understand a secret language, like the one between the bees and tasseling corn or of stones turning in a rising stream.

With a thrum and a flash, this small creature about the size of a ping-pong ball and just as feather light set down her faultless landing gear upon my fingertips. The hooks of her clever, perfect feet were literally live wires on my skin, and she met my stare directly for a count of two; in her glittering jet black eye was both coal and diamond. With the social awkwardness of any first meeting behind us, she politely rummaged through the pile, chose two seeds, and was off like a shot across the snow. As always: the awe of this recurring ability to fly.

I have often wondered how the song birds that spend the entire season in our mountain valley face winter so bravely. The juncos, cardinals, blue jays, nuthatches, woodpeckers, and various finches that remain fixtures around the feeders do all seem well-adapted to the cold; they also seem to come and go somewhat, and I imagine them nipping down a thousand feet when the barometric signal comes. None, however, seem better suited to winter than the chickadees; their black, white, and soft brown plumage even matches the frozen landscape, and their busy shuttling within the loom of the protective pines seems unfazed and even cheerful.

But as the bitter cold continued, espe-

cially at night, and the chickadees stalwartly stayed, I worried more and more about their survival--if, how, and how I could help. I did some reading, and found much to be reassured and fascinated by. Chickadees, I learned, have an extraordinary set of winter survival genetics and skills. For one thing, they replace their feathers at the end of the summer, so when winter comes, their plumage is relatively new. The new plumage is heavier and denser, which increases insulation. (You will also notice birds "fluffed out" on cold days; creating pockets of warm air within their feathers also improves insulation.) Then, they prudently gather food throughout the fall, stuffing seeds and insects behind bark, under leaves, inside knotholes, in clusters of pine needles, and even in snow, around their territories--bird bites in the tens of thousands, research shows, and they can remember hundreds of locations for weeks at a time. In other seasons they feed on insects, caterpillars, spiders, and other bugs, so in the winter, they depend on their caches, and may also peck the fat off a dead deer's body, strip hemlock cones, or even feed on maple sap icicles on the end of snapped sugar maple twigs.

Perhaps most remarkably and most significantly, chickadees have the ability to go into regulated hypothermia, enabling them to lower their body temperature to about 15 degrees F below their normal daytime temperature of 108 degrees F. This allows a bird to conserve its hourly expenditure of calories--the metabolism of these hard-working cold-weather birds runs at a super-rapid-fire rate-- during long cold nights of fasting that might quite likely otherwise kill it. For these dire nights, it is just as important that the chickadee find an extremely insulated roost; just before dark it will head for a tree cavity (they will excavate their own holes in rotted wood, if needed) or a dense tangle of vegetation, where it settles alone, tucking its head into shoulder feathers to reduce heat loss from eyes and beak. As the temperature drops, the bird will begin to shiver to generate heat, and will continue to do so all the night.

A final note to any of us who wonder if our feeders help, or possibly even hurt: extensive studies have determined that the birds do not become dependent on feeders--they seem to know that they cannot expect a rich source of food to

last long, so continue to search constantly for others. No need to worry, therefore, if a popular feeder empties during your absence--but that extra food source definitively improves the percentage of birds' survival.

So let us raise a hand to the chickadee, and, like them, search persistently for and perceive the gifts of every season, including a warm spot in the blank, white, bright cover of snow. **CBN**

Moby Stick by Erik Johanson

Photo of Leopold in his cone-of-shame, sporting a salmon bib for mealtime.

It started with a whimper.



Leopold is a pretty tough dude and out in the woods he never stays right by my side. But on this blustery winter afternoon one recent Saturday there he was, sitting right by me. He gave off a little mewing kind of noise. While we're out and about hiking, leaping over logs and boulders, and generally thrashing through the woods is much more his M.O. But there he was.

I knelt down to give him a pet and check on him. I thought if anything he'd scraped himself on some errant barbed wire. Maybe he strained a paw. Giving him a quick once over nothing appeared amiss. Taking in one last glance of the view from the hill behind our house we turned around and trudged back through the snow with his sister Arabela. Leo was following slower than usual--highly suspect.

At this point I should clarify that Arabela and Leopold are rescue dogs, both from high-kill shelters in Selma, Alabama. They were adopted several months apart through Bad**'s Brooklyn, a remarkable rescue service that's saved the lives of thousands of pups, one even made it onto the cover of *Vogue*. Fernando, my partner, and I adopted them while living together in Brooklyn. After see-

ing Arabela, who's part skittish Chihuahua, get spooked by one too many honking garbage trucks, large uniformed men with banging handcarts or just the general cacophony of urban life, we were inspired to seek out a greater peace, eventually ending up in Halcott, probably one of--if not the--best stroke of luck in our and their lives.

So we're coming out of the woods and Leo's taking lots of little breaks to sit down in the path I've cut through the snow. I'm growing more and more suspicious that something more significant than a minor cut or sprain has happened, but he's still diligently making his way back home. At least he still has his wits about him. Bela is completely nonplussed with her normal routine of running laps around me, leaping through snowdrifts and generally living her best life.

We get back home and I announce to Fernando, "something's definitely up with Leo, can you get the Vet on the line?" I lay him down on a comfortable chair he usually prefers to perch on. Then there it is. A relatively small red circular scar on the left side of his chest, just below his rib cage. I press it very gently and can see some red tissue. "Nan [short for FerNANDo]: he's going to need stitches!" There are a handful of other slight scratches on his hind legs, but nothing too alarming. Of course there happens to be no surgeon at our local vet's office that day. They start us down a rabbit hole of other options for veterinary care. Oneonta? Ithaca? Are you kidding me, that's 90 minutes away or more!?

We start 10 mph over the speed limit directly towards Kingston, making calls on the way over finally reaching a 24 hour emergency veterinary hospital. Nan's in the back seat with Leo holding him still, checking in on the coming blizzard that called for shutting down New York City's subway system--for the second time ever, particularly ironic in that it was built to avoid this specific type of weather event. We fly into the lot, parking on a diagonal over three spots directly in front of the entrance. We run inside with Leo and he's checked in. The nurses come by to weigh him and check basic vitals--his tail is still wagging through all of this. We start to calm down thinking it's all going to be alright and he's just going to need a few stitches.

The head vet comes in with a weary look.

While it's a good sign that his tail is wagging he yelps and flinches if they press down on other parts of his belly or chest. The vet knows something else is up. A shot is given and an X-ray taken. We're brought into a dark room to review the results with Leo laying on his side on a metal bed, tail still wagging, but a little less so. His belly is shaking. I take one look at the photo, then a closer look. "Doc, I'm going to need to sit down, I'm about to faint," I say as the vet confirms that yes, that straight line running through Leo is definitely not some part of puppy anatomy foreign to me. It's a stick.

At this point they start to prep the operating room and I'm Googling the prayer of St. Francis of Assisi. Fernando's holding my hand and I'm starting to tear up. The vet tells us they're going to do exploratory surgery and figure out the extent of the damage. It's a good sign that he's still awake but he's starting to go into shock. The vet informs us it'll be at least a few hours and he'll have to stay the night, it's time for us to go home. They will call us if anything changes.

Driving home at dusk down Route 28 I'm reciting that prayer over and over.

We settle in back home, teary eyed and drained. Of course Bela is lounging in places normally reserved for Leo, enjoying the run of the house. Though she at least seems confused about where her partner in crime is. The phone rings... I put my shoes on. We're out the door speeding down 28 right back to Kingston. There's a stick alright and like some twisted spearfisher, mother nature appears to have a taste for puppy kidney! "That's the one you only need one of, right?" Yes. But they can't take it out in Kingston.

The historic blizzard is starting to come down as we're now speeding away from Kingston with Leo. Much heavier snow is falling on the other side of the frozen Hudson. Leo is on a large plastic tupperware cover, our makeshift puppy stretcher. Of course the GPS navigation decides to black out for the first time ever after putting in the address for Katonah Bedford Veterinary Center. We're running circles around some anonymous commercial office park by the highway. We are grateful for splurging on the Trail Rated version of the car and turn the Select-Terrain II to "Snow" as we start speeding down the icy Taconic to Bedford Hills, NY--an hour and a half away. Time is of the

essence. Leo's knocked out with his tongue dangling out of his mouth. This was not the plan for Saturday!

Pulling in again diagonally across three spots we burst into the second veterinary hospital of the night. Leo's immediately brought into the operating room. The Kingston vet has already debriefed Katonah Bedford. The poor guy's opened up once again. Yes it is a stick. Yes it speared a kidney. Yes that kidney's got to go. We sign off on all the paperwork and say a little prayer as they swipe the AmEx. Kiss that vacation abroad goodbye!

Sitting in the veterinary center lobby there's a mother and young daughter anxious to hear about their parrot's health. They hear a squawk down the hall and the child's face lights up. This place does everything. They're going home soon. Looking around for distraction while we anxiously await news I find a copy of a children's illustrated book, *All Dogs Go to Heaven*. NOT what I need to come across right now!

Dr. Elijah Davis brings us into a private room at the Katonah Bedford Veterinary Center. A number of scenarios are presented to us. Generally all scenarios are positive but it's going to take time for him to fully recover. They send us back up to the Catskills. Bela is wagging her tail a little too aggressively as we walk into the house, well into the middle of the night. She's starting to look more and more like the star of a Catskills telenovela, Leo her latest victim!

Two days pass and it's starting to look like Monday Leo will be released. We're assured by all of the staff after multiple phone calls that he's moving around and his tail is always wagging. Our little trooper! We finally get the call late Monday morning from the surgeon, Dr. Thomas Monaco, that he sees no reason to keep Leo another night. He's in good spirits, no other organs appear to have been damaged. Dr. Monaco's never seen anything like it. Beaming with joy we drive back down to Bedford Hills as soon as possible with a car load of soft blankets and pillows to keep him comfortable on the bumpy ride back home.

Pacing in the lobby we hear calls for "patient Leo" over the intercom, then his characteristic pitter patter on the tile floor. He bursts out of the ER's double doors and runs to us, tail wag-

ging furiously in all his cone-of-shame glory! Dr. Monaco appears in a state of slight disbelief and asks us if we want to see a photo. He pulls out his iPhone and shows us pictures of the blighted kidney with a stick going straight through it. Bulls eye, mother nature! He tells us how lucky Leo is and that it looks like he's in line for a full recovery. Just keep him calm and relaxed, administer the meds.

Over the next week I mastered the art of dispensing peanut butter covered prophylaxis and generally how to run what would definitely be a five star puppy spa. After a few days Leo started to show signs of his normal personality. Started to wrestle with his sister once again and begin to leap through snow drifts with aplomb. He's since had his staples removed and is off his medications and eating a delicious diet of freshly prepared meals, doctors orders.

If you haven't met Leo he's the little shaggy black rat terrier/shiba inu/lab mix with a curled tailed and a white bib of fur on his chest who'll come running up to you if you ride by on your bike or jog past the house. Universally he'll come full throttle at you to receive some heavy petting, belly rubs or a treat (he regularly leaps into the FedEx and UPS guys' trucks knowing full well where the treats are, and has a very strong affection for our lovely Lanore!). His sister Bela usually hangs back and gives a little timid protective howl, part-Chihuahua/part-Border Collie that she is.

When we first returned home from the vet in Kingston (vet number one of two that night) I ran back into the woods like a crazed Ahab looking for my Moby Stick. Retracing Leo's paw prints through the snow I think I can tell where he must have leapt off a boulder, losing his footing, falling on that ill placed stick in the deep snow. Dr. Monaco preserved the stick that speared Leo's kidney. We're taking suggestions on how best to memorialize it.

A thousand heartfelt thank yous to Dr. Thomas Monaco of Katonah Bedford Veterinary Center, Bedford Hills, NY. Dr. Monaco with Dr. Elijah Davis saved our little Leo's life. It's a hike in an emergency but I've never encountered a more professional veterinarian staff--they're pulling off miracles over there. Many thanks to Dr. Susan Black of the Emergency Veterinary Center,

Kingston, NY. And many many thanks to all of the friends and neighbors near and far who've stopped by to check in on Leo. He's very much enjoyed each and every delicious treat. That tail's always waggin'!

FARMER'S JOYS

"Once you have had a wonderful dog, a life without one, is a life diminished." –Dean Koontz
(Author)

"There is no good flock without a good shepherd and no good shepherd without a good dog." – Scottish saying

Great dogs...

Perhaps one of the greatest blessings of living on a family dairy farm –next to the opportunity to share with my husband and children in the day to day joys as well as struggles- is being able to work with animals on a daily basis. I have long enjoyed animals of all kinds. As a child, my family always had dogs, cats and sometimes other critters such as guinea pigs, turtles and fish, gracing our home. My mom showed champion-caliber Cocker Spaniels and I used to love watching her skillfully groom the dogs to show ring perfection. Mom found great joy in working with her dogs, any dogs really, and was so good with them, and I think that planted a seed in my heart. Little did I realize then what amazing, utterly faithful canine co-adventurers were awaiting me in the decades to follow.

Over the years, my family and I have been blessed with many good dogs. When we first began farming in 1989 over on the Vinny and Leta Long Farm in the Denver Valley, we became the lucky surrogate family for Nitzel, a Shepherd/Husky dog that belonged to my brother in law Kim's family. What I remember best about Nitzel was how good he was to Elena and Greg, who were about 4 and 2 years of age at the time. Nitzel was an older dog when he came to us and his passing left a void for a couple of years until Amasa Peck called one day saying he had a litter of Australian Cow Dog/Coon Hound puppies and he had a female picked out for us. We named that pup "Copper". Copper wasn't much for working

cows, but boy, did she watch over the farm here with all her might. I don't think anything passed through here without her knowing it. She alerted us to visitors, chased coyotes, ran down foxes, and captured woodchucks, possums and, unfortunately, the occasional porcupine. Copper was a great companion, always ready to move fence, go for a walk, share a bite to eat or just hang out in the house or barn.

In the summer of 2002, a seemingly routine trip to Pine Hill Lake to take the kids swimming for the afternoon opened the door to what I'm certain will be a life-long love affair with Border Collies. While at the lake, I bumped into a friend whose son was in Greg's class at school. We got to talking and she mentioned that her mom, whom I had met the year before at the son's birthday party and enjoyed immensely, had a Border Collie pup that she needed to find a home for. We had never owned a Border Collie before but I was intrigued. Within about a week Elena and I made the trek to Treadwell to see the pup. We fell in love with the rather quiet, beautiful black and white little female named "Corrie". As Corrie grew and became more confident, she became not only a tremendous help on our farm but an inseparable friend as well. Where I went, she went, always happily, too, no matter what the weather or time of day or night. Her skill with the cows and sheep had far more to do with her innate intelligence than my ability to train her. (Indeed, she taught me more than I ever taught her!) Corrie had that sixth sense, in addition to a desire to have order that allowed her to do things here without a word being spoken. And, it wasn't simply that she carried out her work but that she did it in a way that wasn't rough on the livestock. She was, in stock dog lingo, "kind to her stock." We had a special bond that I had never had to that degree with any other dog before. I could go on and on about her; Corrie was simply the greatest dog I have ever had the pleasure of being around. Sadly, she passed away in December. To say that I miss her would be an understatement. Fittingly, we buried her near the sheep pen she so proudly watched over for many years.

Because Corrie was such a positive experience, about two years after we got her we added



her brother (from a later litter), "Bob", to the mix. Bob doesn't quite have his sister's stock sense but he does a good job patrolling the place and he loves to walk with us to do whatever we're doing. Bob is also very obedient, and rather a clown, so he provides comic relief that is welcome on long days. As a young dog, Bob suffered an injury to one of his eyes that ultimately left him blind in that eye. I have learned a lot about the resiliency and heart of the Border Collie by watching this one-eyed dog continue on his happy-go-lucky ways without missing a beat.

Our latest Border Collie addition came last September in a special little tri-color package from the same breeder as Corrie and Bob. We have very high hopes for this pup," Dot"-so named for her many black and tan polka dots on her front legs and tan spots above her eyes. Her mother, Khyte, was imported from England, coming from one of the most successful Border Collie breeders and sheepdog trialists in the world. Dot's father, Moss, is an outstanding working dog on my friend's farm. Already we're seeing a keen, fearless will to work both cattle and sheep in addition to blazing speed in the now 8 month old pup. I especially love that Dot has become my shadow, seeking me out if we're apart for too long, much like Corrie used to do. Dot has helped make this rather long winter more bearable with her willingness (and need to drain some energy!) to walk even on some of the rawest of days. Our walks will be curtailed for about a week now while Dot heals from being spayed today. Keeping her relatively still for that long will be a challenge but I look forward to just spending some quiet time with her here in the house. Hopefully, ours will be a long, healthy, mutually beneficial relationship. Actually, given what I've learned from each dog we have been privileged to own, I'm certain she and any others to come will more than hold up their end of the bargain and, really, it's up to me to be worthy of their devotion.

And Lambs...

Lambing season commenced with gusto during the month of January. We had a flurry of new arrivals that slowed a bit over the month of February. Nearly every birth was twins this year; to date we have 22 new lambs. Thankfully, even with all of the cold and snow, the little ones have fared well (thank you, Premier Sheep Supply

Company for your fleece lamb jackets--truly a super invention). We do have 4 bottle lambs--lambs that ewes didn't quite have enough milk for--but they are thriving as well. Most everyone has lambed by now so it's down to the business of keeping the flock healthy and growing. It's really satisfying, as well as fun, to watch the lambs grow and change and chase each other around the sheep lot. We have a few lambs with funny, almost clownish, markings on their faces that bring a smile to my face even on the most challenging of days.

And finally, Rabies Reminder ...

Spring is just around the corner and with the onset of warmer weather both we and our pets will be outdoors more often. Now is a good time to review the vaccination status of your pets or any animals you may be feeding. Although there is no substitute for a good working relationship with your local veterinarian, Greene County Public Health offers a valuable service to county residents with rabies clinics held at various sites around the County. Dates for its 2015 rabies clinics have been announced. The closest one for Halcott residents will be held April 29th from 6-8 pm at the Lexington Firehouse on Route 42 in Lexington. These clinics are for dogs, cats and ferrets (please call ahead 518-719-3600 for ferrets or for any questions regarding rabies). Pet owners are asked to bring a record of pet's previous vaccination to receive a 3-year certificate otherwise a one year vaccination will be given. Donations are highly encouraged. **JD**

GARDEN PARTY

Marc Neves

The evening of January 18th seemed to be a most auspicious date for a party - a 3-day weekend and welcome break from the cold and snow that has offered little respite this winter. The Halcott Gardeners decided to face down the elements and throw a garden party at the Grange, presenting an evening of food, drink, music and warmth for the benefit of The Halcott Community Garden. But it almost did not happen. One of the countless snow storms of this winter chose that night to descend on both the valley and region, presenting a sig-



nificant obstacle for both performers and audience. But the draw of great music and companionship prevailed and the midwinter Garden Party proved a smashing success,

bringing in 40+ people in the middle of what could easily be called a blizzard.

While the top of the bill, international tap dancing star, Brenda Bufalino, was stranded in New Paltz, the attending performers – locally grown musicians and gardeners all - put on a show that left no audience member wanting for talent or entertainment. The evening began with MC Carrie Bradley Neves performing songs from her long career in music as a songwriter, violinist and singer. Carrie's set included the great Ed's Redeeming Qualities garden anthem, Swiss Chard and a rendition of Rick Nelson's Garden Party. She then handed the stage over to fellow local gardener and musician, Willy Baer and his band The Shrubs. The Shrubs, which also included Jim Lippman on drums and Jesse Lehman on bass, brought a couple decades of Lower East Side musicianship to our local community for the first time but hopefully not the last. Last to take the stage were local favorites, The Pine Hill Playboys, featuring our own Jim Rauter and his band of old-time musicians. They were joined by Carrie Bradley Neves on violin/fiddle and carried the evening through to a fantastic finale. Watch for future shows by Jim and the rest of the Playboys at the Pine Hill Community Center.

Throughout the evening, an army of volunteers ranging from chef Sheila Reynertson, to decorators Greg and Camille, to bartenders Kurt and Margarita kept audience members comfortable, sated and happy. Ticket takers Lucy, Lydia, Julia & Nicole assured that the benefit of this benefit materialized by collecting around \$300 for

the Community Garden. The funds raised will be used for, among other things, buying communal potato and onion seeds and for repairing fencing around the garden. Thank you to everyone who helped make the event so successful by creating a perfect ambience, cooking delicious food, performing wonderful music, and donating time, prizes and housing.

We can only hope that next January will bring a second annual Midwinter Garden Party. Until then, relive the evening and follow the progress of the Halcott Community Garden at the blog: halcottgardeners.blogspot.com/. Also, watch for notice of the Halcott Community Garden's Natural Selection Plant Sale to be held at the Grange sometime in May.

No Cats in the Catskills Pattie Kelder

Standing near the store counter, the grocer's tone caught my attention. Clearly upset, he was saying that the price of lions had just tripled. I did a double take and looked at the other customer. He was looking at me, equally mystified. We turned back to the grocer who tried again. "You know, *lee-moans . . . green lioms!*" Aha! He went on to say that drugs were turning up in lime shipments from Mexico. Impounded limes meant a lesser supply, hence higher prices.

After sympathizing with his plight, I started contemplating limes of a different color, namely mountain lions I'd heard about in the Halcott Valley. The first lion I personally remember seeing was legally held in captivity. Along about 1970, our family had gone over to the now closed Wake Robin Sanctuary outside Roxbury. Dad's friend, Bruce Caswell, brought out an adult South American puma on a leash for him to pet. Dad was awestruck.

Sometime later, on a summer night in the '80s, I chanced across some wildlife at the foot of Kelly Hill Road on my way home from a rehearsal. As I slowed to a stop, I saw two unfamiliar animals playing in the middle of County Route 3. The ease of their movements afforded full opportunity for observation from all angles. Then, they simply vanished, as if summoned. On these points I am certain:

- 1) They were young, wild, and feline.
- 2) They were tawny in color, like deer, with faint dark spots.

3) Each had a smooth, long tail that hung in a J shape, ending in a black tip. Tail length roughly matched body length of 13 to 15 inches.

Research led to the conclusion that these were mountain lion cubs. I'd never seen the young before. Quite sure that no one would believe such a story; I said nothing for the better part of fifteen years. Eventually I broke silence with Bob Johnson who had his own tale to tell.

Bob had long heard about mountain lions.

The creamery inspector had told of several sightings in the Long Woods between Roxbury and Grand Gorge. Closer to home, two lions had been seen by many people near Russell Morrison's sap house one summer when Charlie Rose's goats were on the

loose. Bob, however, had never seen mountain lions until later when his family went to the Catskill Game Farm in the early '60s.

Soon after that excursion, Bob and his dad, Jim mowed the Deemer place up to the Steinfeld line. The morning they checked to see if the hay was ready to bale, they noticed the heifers following a deer across the pasture. After it went on over the wall into the field, it lay down and started rolling around in the new mown hay. Peculiar behavior for a deer, the men thought. Then they noticed it had a long tail.

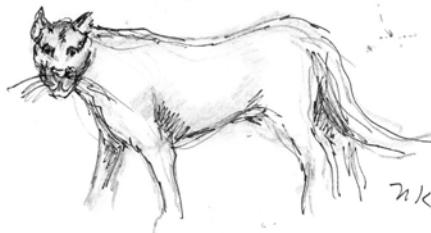
While Jim kept watch, Bob hurried home, returning with Audrey, Gloria and a farm cadet in the jeep. More importantly, he brought along a rifle with a scope for a real good look. He proceeded to walk along the track and cross the stream into the thick brush just below the Steinfeld house where Jim indicated the lion had gone. Suddenly he heard something. The lion was lying in the grass right in front of him! It made a bee line toward the barn with all eyes watching before turning into the Deemer sap bush. Bob lost no time getting his beagle and tracking the lion across to Hubbard Road, losing the trail only briefly where the big cat had traversed the length of a downed tree. Part way up Hubbard Road, he

concluded they couldn't catch up and called off the search.

Gloria Sadowski remembers several details of the event like hearing the heifers bawl, seeing the lion go by and witnessing the ribbing Bob later got from her Uncle Roy and Bill Ballard, who missed out on the excitement. She also remembers hearing the accounts of others. Her great grandfather, Giles Munson, experienced multiple encounters on Palenville Mountain as he drove stage coach with the mail. In the same generation, an old lady took ill with a fever in the middle of the night at the Roberts place. Harold Roberts drove her over the hill to a doctor in Denver by horse and bobsleigh while one of the other men of the family held the woman. Every time she screamed in pain, a wild cat answered her. It is not known if they ever determined what kind of cat traveled with them that night. Nevertheless, the account piqued my interest, having seen an adult lion cross Mead Road just below the Roberts house one night in the early '80s.

Now fast forward to the summer after the hundred year flood of 1996. Our highway department was busy hauling material from Wachtell's gravel bank in Johnson Hollow to repair roads. One hot, hot afternoon as Russell Bouton eased the loaded army truck around the corner onto Mead Road he saw what appeared to be a deer slowly crossing the field between Ted and Stacey Johnson's house on the hill and Alan Reynolds' shop. It was right out in the open, not at all scared of the noisy truck. On looking closely, he realized the animal had a real long tail. It was an adult mountain lion, probably headed to the stream for a drink. Russell thought he was seeing things until he compared notes with others.

Within a few days' time, Al Doubrava, a Highway Committee member on the Town Board at the time, went out to inspect a work site near Sadowski's and Wachtell's. Upon leaving, he saw what he assumed was a deer in the hayfield diagonally across from the entrance to Steinfeld Road. That assessment changed when the animal stepped out and crossed Route 3 in front of him. Seeing a long tail, Al hurried back to the construction site to warn Highway Superintendent Dan Johnson.



Likewise, and in the same general location, Artie Sadowski saw two young ones bounding through the hay. When they also crossed the road in front of him, there was no mistaking their long rope tails. *[This article will continue in our Summer issue. Stay tuned!]*

Correspondence from Blanche Beckmann

I was so sorry to hear that Odell Reynolds died. I was one of the city people (who late in life, 19) became a summer visitor to the farm run by Pa and Eliza and then to my great good fortune was accepted as a close family friend. So much so, that I was given a piece of land with a big rock on it with deed included. I had planned to build a small house but marriage to a pediatrician made a weekend home an impossibility and when Willie was selling his land I returned it.

Clarett and the family were the best education I ever got. They were intelligent people, very intelligent people without college degrees. I was honored to be loved and to love them. I even began to take courses in Rural Sociology. But back to Odell: he was gorgeous. You described him well. We all not so secretly hoped he would invite us to the Saturday night dances at Lexington. I was never so lucky. You didn't mention that he served in Korea, worked on building Bel Ayre ski slope enterprise. It was an incredible family. Of course you all know the story of these incredible women who turned their homes into summer boarding houses when the price of milk was so low it was often spilt. ...

Question: was Dennis Bouton the son of Donald Bouton, brother of Bernie Bouton (also called Irish) nephew of Mike Morse? I am going to be 89 in June and I cherish my Halcott days. I am enclosing a picture of Odell but I can't part with it, so please return it in the enclosed envelope. Sincerely, Blanche Beckmann (nee Cooper)

PASSAGES

As this issue goes to print, we are saddened to learn of the loss of yet another Halcott hero. **Jackie Pagano**, our hometown medical authority,



volunteer worker for the town and good friend, died early on the morning of March 8th, 2015. We all knew Jackie as the person to call with a strange rash or a persistent cough or anything else you were unable to talk about (or didn't care to talk about) to your doctor. Not only did she have a suggestion, but her remedies worked! But what was less well known were the other services Jackie performed for Halcott. She was the unpaid clerk for Justice Vic Pagano. She was a loyal member and secretary of the Halcott Republican Committee, taking careful notes at every caucus. She sat on the Grievance Board for the Town of Halcott, making delicious marinated peppers for annual meetings, according to past Town assessor Gary Marks. She

was a member of the Halcott Election Board, those faithful volunteers who struggled from their warm beds on election day to open the polls by 6AM, close them not until 9PM and then waited patiently until all absentee ballots were counted. She seemed to step up to every under-sung position, as so many Halcott residents do, and with her vivacious smile, her untamed head of beautiful hair, and her lovely manner, she made a difference in our town. She leaves a legacy her loving family can be proud of. **IK**

Many of us were lucky enough to hear the toes twinkling fiddling of **Hilton Kelly**. Or better, to have enjoyed an in depth conversation with Hilt about the old days, sipping like a good wine his philosophical take on life. Hilton always seemed to be smiling, and when you met him, you smiled too, because you knew you were in for another good story. He lost his 14 year battle with prostate cancer on March 3, 2015. His daughter, Linda Kelly Armour, has sent us the following account of his life. It's quietly astonishing and humbling to read how much he managed to stuff into 89 and a half years.

Hilton was born July 18, 1925 in the Red Kill Valley (also known as Bedell) to Edith Kittle Kelly and Carson Kelly. He attended Fleischmanns High School, and served in the Army from May 1945 to December 1946. When he returned he continued working on his family's dairy farm, and married Stella Mech in 1948.

In addition to farming, Hilt lived off the land in many other ways. He hauled milk for local

farmers first to the Halcott Center Creamery, and later to Roxbury. He also had a trucking business, delivering everything from GLF (present day Agway) products, sand, gravel, and sawdust, to the trunks of student campers, which arrived by train in Fleischmanns and were delivered to Camp Ta-Ri-Go. He was in building construction, having built the home that he and his wife Stella occupied for nearly 60 years. That home included cherry lumber harvested from his farm in the head of the valley. He also built several other homes in the valley, and even his own first boat. In the winters he plowed snow for many neighbors in the valley and beyond, and in the spring made maple syrup from the sap bush on his family farm.

Hilt was a fire commissioner for many decades and member of the Bedell and Covesville Cemetery Associations. He enjoyed hunting and fishing, camping and boating with his family and friends, league bowling, and a pinochle card club with his and Stella's good friends. He was always willing to do a favor or lend a hand to his neighbors or anyone who needed it.

Hilt was best known as an old time fiddler from the Catskill Mountains. He began playing the fiddle at the age of 5, then playing square dances at school, and eventually, at age 15, he started playing with The Melody Boys, a local band. After marrying Stella, she became proficient at playing the chords on the piano and joined him in playing and calling at square dances. In the late 70's he started a band called Hilt Kelly and The Sidekicks, with Donald Strausser and Donald Erwin joining him and Stella. He played for nearly 8 decades on a second hand fiddle that his grandfather Ward Kelly purchased in the 1880's. In 1994, the Roxbury Arts group dedicated their Performance Center as "Hilt Kelly Hall," and in 1997 he was inducted into the New York State Old Tyme Fiddlers Association hall of Fame. He was honored in 2013 for his decades of playing and calling square dances at the Westkill Community Hall. His band played for decades at The Gas Up in Gallupville, and has played many other venues in and beyond the Catskills. He also spent a great deal of time teaching traditional music to youngsters both in Roxbury Central School and the Manhattan Country School Farm, as well as other aspiring fiddlers in the Catskill Mountain tradition.

March, 2015

Dear Friends: If you liked this issue of *The Times of Halcott*, we are happy! It has been put together by a very loyal group of residents who love our town and want to preserve the sense of community that seems pretty rare in other places of the world these days. We'd like to point out with modesty that this marks our 70th issue. Another dedicated group administers the Halcott Community Fund which not only pays for the publication and mailing of this newsletter, but also for many other small (and not so small!) things, such as running the annual Halcott Fair, helping our Halcott Community Garden, working together with the Town to maintain the Grange Hall, and donating to the Halcott United Methodist Church, the Fleischmanns Fire Department, Margaretville Central School, the Skene Memorial Library, and emergency help to neighbors in need.

Every March, we include an envelope in the newsletter in hopes that you will send a donation to help with these efforts. Your dollars this past year have kept *The Times of Halcott* coming to your mailbox, given the Town a new refrigerator, paid for a magician at the Halcott Fair, put on a sleigh ride for our kids (although this year's ride was cancelled TWICE due to unreasonably frigid temps) and many other small things that have made life more comfortable.

If you have email and would like to be on the Town list to receive town board agendas, notices, and community activities, please send your email address to: supervisor@townofhalcott.org Visit our website at www.townofhalcott.org to get more information about Halcott. And please contribute to the Halcott Community Fund if you are able. Small towns are endangered in New York State. We hope to protect this one.



The Times of the Halcott United Methodist Church

Spring 2015 *Pattie Kelder, Correspondent*

The Times of the Halcott United Methodist Church

Spaghetti Supper

Mark your calendars for a mouthwatering Spaghetti Supper scheduled for Saturday, May 16th, at the Grange Hall. Take outs will be available at 4:30 and sit downs start at 5:00. SOS: With much of our kitchen crew rather gimpy this spring, offers of help from the community would be greatly appreciated. Thanks!

A Legend Departs

Many readers will recall the lively fiddle music of Hilton Kelly, who passed away on March 3rd. He may not have been from Halcott, but he was certainly part of the fabric of this valley. Along with his wife, Stella, he enchanted dozens of youngsters with his annual Christmas rendition of *Marvelous Toy* at the Grange Hall. Many a summer's night found him calling square dances from the same stage with the Sidekicks, sometimes in preparation for a national stage. He and Stella often brought square dancing into the local schools as part of their commitment to pass along the tradition to the next generation.

Square dance calling was a logical topic for my folklore project in college. Hilton readily agreed to be interviewed (if I would destroy the tape!), as did Dad and one of my uncles. So far as I know, my transcription is still archived on Cooperstown. Hilton's legendary qualities were not limited to music. He had an astonishing file of memories catalogued in his mind along an internal time line – names, events, dates, the whole nine yards. To top it off, he possessed a storytelling wit that captivated. To be able to repeat a fraction of what he told would be a wonderful thing.

We can all thank the Lord for allowing Hilton to live in our neck of the woods and his family for sharing him with us. Hilton will be missed far and wide.

Amazing Dollars and Sense about Malaria

Not everyone knows that malaria once plagued parts of the Americas before being eradicated in this hemisphere. In recent years, there have been concerted efforts by the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, the United Methodist Church and others to prevent or even halt malaria in Africa.

Our District Superintendent, the Rev. Jim Moore, tells the story of a colleague who was accommodated by a local family while in Africa on a mission trip. At bedtime, when he learned that a mosquito net was only big enough for two people, he offered to be the one sleeping outside the net. Back in the states, he soon was hospitalized with a case of malaria which put him in a coma. His family was making plans for his funeral when he finally pulled through a week later. The man showed Jim his \$250,000 medical bill to illustrate what can happen for lack of a \$10 net.

Nets are only one facet of this denomination's \$75 million campaign to end malaria in Africa. The approach taken by the United Methodist Committee on Relief also includes elimination of stagnant water, trash removal around homes, training, free or low cost medicines, consultations and indoor residual spraying. In eastern New York and western Connecticut we are halfway to a regional goal of \$1.2 million for this campaign. Anyone who feels led to contribute \$10 to avert another \$250,000 medical bill (or worse) is invited to make checks payable to the Halcott United Methodist Church with "No More Malaria" in the memo. We plan to send these gifts in time for "No More Malaria Day" on April 24th. Thank you.

New District Superintendent

Upon the Rev. Jim Moore's retirement at the end of June, the Rev. Tim Riss will be appointed as Superintendent of the Catskill Hudson District. He pastored the Halcott and Fleischmanns churches from 1981 to 1984 before moving to posts in Franklin,

Catskill and Long Island. We welcome him back to these parts.

Lenten Gatherings

All are warmly invited to:

- Dish to pass supper on Thursday, March 26th at 6:30 in Margaretville UMC
- Interfaith Council Good Friday Service on Friday, April 3rd at noon in Fleischmanns Community UMC
- Easter Service on Sunday, April 5th at 10:30 in Halcott UMC

Danger Around Us

“The devil is working overtime.” That’s what my cousin says. I think he’s on to something. Separating us from God is Satan’s business. He’s had a lot of practice finding our Achilles tendon *du jour* and he’s good at it.

When I was in college, the first thing Campus Ministry taught us is the closer we draw to God, the harder the evil one will work to interfere. We should *expect*, therefore, to encounter obstacles and prepare to handle them. “Prior planning prevents poor performance,” my sister always said whenever the OR staff prepped for surgery. And make no mistake. The devil’s idea of open

heart surgery is not in our best interest!

When Jeremiah told us (truthfully), “If, with all your heart, ye truly seek Him, ye shall ever surely find Him,” he didn’t mean no effort would be required. Seeking requires awareness, time, energy and a measure of help from a search party of other believers. Even when we find Him, we’re not out of the woods. The devil keeps coming up with more ways to drive a wedge between us and God.

Through life experience we become more aware of the variety of things that can go wrong. We learn firsthand that illness, financial insecurity, broken relationships and shattered dreams can - and do - sideline us. Hardship exposes us to doubt. It can be difficult to trust God when times are tough. Enter the opportunistic one who preys on our vulnerability.

Why are we caught by surprise? God loves us and carries us through the hard times. God is more powerful than Satan. This means we don’t have to surrender to the evil one. Ever. God is our caring shepherd. He is not a wolf in sheep’s clothing. We can trust in His immortal protection at all times. “I am with you always,” Jesus told His disciples in Mt. 28:20. Even through their martyrdom at the end, He was. And He is for us, too.

SPRING 2015

The Times
of Halcott
813 Route 3
Halcott
Cortland, NY

