

Animal Park (Part I)

by Henry Pelifian

*"The robin is the one.
That interrupts the morn
With hurried, few, express reports
When March is scarcely on."*

*"If I shouldn't be alive
When the robins come,
Give the one in red cravat
A memorial crumb."*

Emily Dickinson

Sometimes someone's saunter became displeasurable with a foot fault on pet droppings in Malone Town Park, a recreational area where man attempted to exist harmoniously with his own kind, a difficult proposition in any clime, place or time. It was a superb park with a large gazebo, two baseball fields, a cinder running track surrounding the park and open spaces of grass with benches scattered about. Many area citizens would bring their dogs to excrete, more informally to do *pu-pu* or *du-du* in the park as they strolled. Everyone permitted their pets to do as they pleased and no one was in any way bothered by it, or so it seemed. No one seemed to mind that there was no *pooper-scooper* law, which requires pet owners to dispose of their pet's waste in garbage properly, instead of

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leaving it on the grass or road. When there were only a few dogs, the excretions would biodegrade unnoticed and nobody was the wiser, but as time elapsed, more and more people brought their dogs to the ever more popular town park. Dog defecations were everywhere. If you wanted to relax by taking a stroll with a loved one you might occasionally put your foot in some of the dog dung when you walked on the grass. A constant wary eye was necessary as one walked in an otherwise sublime park with a wonderful assortment of trees, maple, spruce, pine, black maple and birch.

The park was also a way station for the animals, birds and mammals. Even a few reptiles and amphibians used the park, which was nestled between a forest and a pond. For Molly the robin, the desecration of the park by dogs became intolerable and unbearable as she roamed the park sidestepping the dungful surroundings. Her alertness had been magnifying with each passing day, but only after she actually saw herself did things begin to change.

Molly the robin had arrived from South Carolina where she had gone every autumn to avoid the winter and returned to upstate New York in mid-March every year. In flitting about the park grounds searching for worms, Molly had alighted upon a car in the parking lot. Molly had landed on the door mirror on the driver's side and as she turned her head, she saw her reflection in the window. She needed to get closer to the image, for her curiosity overwhelmed her so, she hopped on the crevice of the window. Her head was too close to the window forcing her to turn her head that was now opposite the outside rear view mirror. She saw herself. Molly was so amazed and startled she leapt back onto the top of the mirror. An inner need drove her back to the window crevice to look one more time. Again, she saw herself.

Jack Dakasian had gone for a jog in the park for the first time since returning from Sarkhan and he saw a robin perched on Mr. Shive's car looking at itself in the mirror. He thought it unusual as he drove away and in the distance, he saw Mr. Shive walking his dog, Ginger around the park.

Molly turned away from the mirror unsure of what she was seeing. She swiveled her head looking directly into the mirror recognizing her own kind. Her head kept darting away from the mirror and back again, for she had never seen herself in a mirror. It was something new and novel. Something triggered in her head, her mind, a new beginning.

Molly was rather plump and her dark orange breast seemed matronly. She had had several broods in her lifetime, building nests and laying eggs were familiar aspects to her life. But seeing herself in the mirror was something far reaching. She flew over the hood of the car to the outside mirror on the passenger side landing on the window crevice. She turned her head seeing herself again. Her fervor drove her to agitation by flying to the top of the mirror and back to the crevice in the window to look at herself time and again. She stared at herself, and then went to the top of the mirror and to the crevice three more times. Molly sought out another parked car a few feet away to look in the mirror. She even went to two other cars. Molly had discovered something that was world shattering for her: knowing that she was seeing herself for the first time was a revelation bringing the pieces of her life together like never before. Her advancement in the world had begun.

Early that evening Molly met with a group of robins, including her partner for life, Chester, beneath a cluster of privet bushes and began to chirp that she had seen herself in a shiny flat stone. No one believed her. It was preposterous the other robins had said. So, the next morning Molly guided the female robins on an excursion of the mirrors on the doors of the cars parked at Malone Town Park that morning as people walked their dogs. The robins led by Molly toured the mirrors of all the cars in the parking lot, all six vehicles. After seeing themselves in twelve mirrors, the robins chattered in rich caroling notes and songs. A wider world opened up to them, a world that they felt a part of. It was a world they had a stake in which they shared with others, the dog owners, who began to notice the birds fixated upon the car mirrors as they walked their pets, allowing them to unencumber themselves.

One park visitor anxious to leave with his inobedient dog in tow on a leash as the dog jumped in the air hitting Chester with his paw, knocking him to the ground. Molly flew to Chester's defense diving at the dog by flapping her wings as the dog lunged at Chester tearing at his wings. Molly swooped upon the dog, who released Chester from his grasp. He fluttered away flying a foot above the ground to the base of a distant maple tree. The man opened the door to his vehicle pulling the dog into the back seat of the car and then he sped away.

"Chester, are you all right?" Molly chirped flying over him.

"My wing has been injured", he warbled.

"These *upright worms* and their home-bred brutes only cause us trouble", Molly chirped

"Their home-brutes do *kha kha* everywhere", Chester warbled.

"Since they are ruining our homes we will do the same to them", Molly chirped with determination and resolution emanating from seeing herself for the first time.

In the succeeding days, Molly was flying to all the door mirrors of the cars at the park and looking at herself in the mirrors. She then flew to the top of each mirror relieving herself. Soon the other robins joined her in covering all the door mirrors and doors with their white paste-like waste. When the *upright worms* saw that their cars were blighted by bird excretion they became enraged and demanded that the town animal control office do something about. The animal control office's first suggestion was to apply red pepper spray to the mirrors of the cars going to the park. The pepper spray was not a deterrent and some *upright worms* wanted the robins shot or captured and taken far away. The animal control office staff said that shooting the birds was out of the question because residential housing was too near, for across the road from the park were homes. The robins continued desecrating the cars and some *upright worms* started taking the law into their own hands. When two robins were killed, friends of Molly's, something had to be done, Molly chirped.

Molly shared her knowledge of the shiny stone with the blue jays, crows, woodpeckers, squirrels, chipmunks, frogs and snakes taking each in turn to the door mirrors of the cars in the parking lot.

Late at night in the moonlight when all the *upright worms* were gone, Molly called a meeting of the creatures living in the park. From the blue jays came Jesse and Jeneen. Harold and Cynthia represented the crows, the woodpeckers Fran and Fram, squirrels Don and Bon, Chipmunks Tidi and Didi, frogs Ronolo and Sonolo and Snakes Swoots and Toots also arrived. They all gathered in the gazebo, a structure adorning the park like a wooden flower.

"The *upright worms* have the power of the shiny stone which I have showed you all. We can see ourselves for the first time. We can know ourselves. We are now the equals of the upright worms", Molly said as she perched on a railing facing those assembled in front of her. All the creatures were on the floor, except the crows that were roosting on the railing opposite Molly.

"How does seeing ourselves in the shiny stone make us equal?" Harold the crow cawed.

"Never before have we been able to see ourselves. The first time I saw myself I thought it was another robin, but each time I looked, I saw something familiar. It was I. Now, I am wiser and stronger. The land we live on is as much ours as it is the *upright worms*. We are equally entitled to the land as much as the *erect worms*. They have invaded our land with dung! Now, they are killing us. The greatest dung producers in the world are the upright worms!" Molly chirped.

"But they are only killing you-the robins-not the rest of us", Fran the woodpecker chipped.

"That's right", Tidi the chipmunk squeaked.

"That's the way it always begins. First, they go after one of us for their own desires. Tomorrow it will be another one of us. Before long we will all be gone, destroyed", Molly chirped.

"But what can we do?" Jesse the blue jay squawked.

"We take back the park. At one time we all had the land and now we have only the park and the nearby small forest. We must make a stand now or we will have nothing!" Molly chirped.

"That's right. My grandfather told me that we once had a thousand times more abundance than now. There were more nuts and berries for us. Now, we have to hunt all day for a few scraps. Things are worse today," Bon the squirrel creaked.

"This is the time to act to save ourselves and the land", Molly chirped.

"But what can we do?" Jesse the blue jay squawked again.

"Do you all agree we must act?" Molly chirped

"All the species raised an appendage in agreement, except one. Paws, wings and legs went up in unison.

"We can run and hide. This is not our fight", Swoots whispered.

"Are your numbers increasing or decreasing?" Molly shouted.

"We are less every year", Swoots whispered again.

"The erect worms are increasing, threatening to overrun us all. We must make a stand now or we will be eliminated", Molly screeched.

"But what can we do?" Jesse the blue jay screeched.

Molly gazed at the creatures crowded in the gazebo standing on the built-in benches around the inside circumference while perched from a railing in the moonlight with a breeze blowing. They were all afraid, fearful of the future. Despite their dread and trepidation, they felt stronger than they had ever been.

"It is simple. We drive the *erect worms* from the park by attacking them from above as well as below. Everyone has a part to play. Must we live in dung all our lives? Give us freedom or we will perish! Let us attack them in the morning!" Molly chirped as an owl silently flew inside the gazebo landing on the railing several feet from Molly.

"In the darkness I have heard you speak foolishly about fighting the *erect worms*. You do not know what you are up against.

Their cunning and wickedness is unimaginable. The only way to prevail is to have a plan for winning”, Mindeo the owl hooted.

Mindeo the owl had observed, watched and scrutinized Molly the robin as she had shown the other robins the secret of the shiny stone. After they had departed the parking lot Mindeo chose a parked car near a tree to see himself in the mirror. At that moment he knew that he was part of a wider world, a world that was equally intricate and valuable for all. It was a revelation that had sparked his development, a development that was more than intuitive broadening to awareness, perception and insight. Sound was communication, something that had been used for millions of years. Now, bridging the gaps among the creatures occurred. A common enemy bespoke a common language of harmony, connection and bonding. Even understanding.

The plan of Mindeo the owl was to commence a campaign against the *erect worms* when the orange ball fell and rose from the sky eight times. At that occasion, the *upright worms* went to the park to stare at the flashes of light and listen to the continuous thunder they made for themselves. It was a light and noise show signifying nothing Mindeo was aware of, except that on that night it was always turmoil and tumult for all the creatures. During the confusion of flashes of light in the darkness and the booming thunder in the park, the residents would launch their offensive maneuver to drive their enemies away. It was a bold strategy and Mindeo convinced those assembled in the gazebo of his wisdom as he hooted away. Mindeo and Molly would each command guerrilla squadrons, which at the appointed hour attack opposite flanks at the height of the explosions on the targeted night.

On the day before the campaign was to begin, Mindeo and Molly organized their forces to practice for the impending battle. Molly decided that she would lead the blue jays, crows, robins, woodpeckers and cardinals while Mindeo would lead the squirrels, chipmunks, frogs and snakes. Late at night they formed two flanks that assaulted toward the entrance/exit road of the park. The zoological beings prepared all night charging in unison both above

the ground and on the ground. There was cooperation everywhere, except with the crows that did not fly upon Molly's command. Only with the risk of losing access to the park were they convinced by Molly and Mindeo did they resume flying and diving in the exercise. At dawn the gathering dispersed to a day of outward normality scampering and flitting about the park.

At dusk the *erect worms* began arriving in the park and setting up their portable chairs while others sat on the grass, easy targets. The standing worms came and came, there seemed to be no end to them, and Molly was worried that they would be vastly outnumbered. Trepidation might turn into panic leading to a rout even before the commencement of hostilities. Molly began flying over the park singing a tune of "if it takes all summer we will fight to win." All who heard it drew strength from Molly's cry, though the *upright worms* were riveted to their anticipated joys and delights. Joys of thunderous light and food was bubbling from their mouths. Mindeo sat perched high in a pine tree overlooking the park ready to signal at the appropriate hour. Molly was in a maple tree on the right flank awaiting the sign to initiate their actions. Slowly the tree Molly was in filled with crows, blue jays, woodpeckers and cardinals while at the bottom of Mindeo's tree the squirrels, chipmunks, snakes and frogs assembled. For Molly it was not preposterous that she was undertaking such a mission, such a bold endeavor. The shiny flat stone had changed everyone. History and evolution had intersected and been sparked by mirrors, as if destiny were a mirror reflecting the present into the future.

In their smug and haughty superiority the *upright worms* never suspected an attack from the creatures of the park, besides they were busy getting comfortable for their noisy show, sitting or positioning themselves for a panoramic view. Their food and drink were jostling around them more as extensions than as extraneous accoutrements to life. As darkness settled upon the park, the clamor and din of blaring explosions punctuated a beautiful star-studded evening. The *upright worms* had their eyes glued to the night sky observing the lightshow commemorating a revolution long ago, the

meaning and hardships long forgotten. Many of the attendees of the festivities were not clearly aware of the history of the revolution or even the sacrifices made to secure success of those early pioneers and revolutionaries. Now, a new revolution was beginning around them, unnoticed by the *upright worms* whose own heritage had disappeared, like the smoke from the impending explosions of sound and light.

At the culmination of the exploding light show, Mindeo hooted his order for the two flanks to commence their assault upon the *erect worms* who were oblivious to the onslaught from the ground and the sorties from above. As Molly and Mindeo drove their troops and flocks closer and closer, the crows of *upright worms* on the outer rows started bolting and screaming. The creature kingdom was sure of their cause and resolute in their determination to become free from the despoilment by the beasts of the *upright worms*: their canine accomplices. Each winged creature flew diving and swarming upon the *vertical worms* who shrieked and howled. Once the enemy on the left flank saw Swoots and Toots and their innumerable offspring crawling over their feet and legs panic ensued and the *erect worms* fled to their hard machines with wheels as the explosions enveloped the night sky adding to the disorder and mayhem. In mid-air over the fleeing *upright worms* Mindeo and Molly congratulated each other on how well the operation was being conducted. They felt invincible flying through the air, maneuvering above and around trees.

The *upright worms* were rushing to their cars, minivans and sport utility vehicles with abandon yelling “snakes and damn birds” leaving behind their portable chairs and dumping popcorn on the ground. The exodus from the park was filled with tires spinning and ripping through the air as the vehicles zoomed away. There was a line of vehicles edging their way to the exit as Molly and others dropped their turds on the windshields causing numerous fender benders hastening the stampede out.

An hour before dawn, assembled in the gazebo, Molly and Mindeo addressed their compatriots.

"You have all performed well and with courage. We have driven out the thorn in our side", Molly sang out.

"We have won the battle, but not the war", Mindeo hooted.

"You mean they will be back?" Harold the crow cawed.

"Almost certainly. They will not give up that easily", Mindeo hooted.

"We must be ever vigilant", Molly chirped.

Molly decided to place sentries near the gate to the park to signal the alarm when the erect worms returned. It happened sooner than expected. The next afternoon the animal control officers employed by the town on a contractual basis arrived with nets. Tidi and Didi scampered around squeaking as loudly as possible that the vertical worms had come back. The two control officers darted around trying to catch any residents of the park. Molly was resting in a tree in the forest adjacent to the park unaware of the arrival of the *vertical worms*. The officers saw winged creatures in the trees looking down on them as they turned and saw Jesse the blue jay on a fence post. They ran towards him swinging their nets. In trying to avoid one control officer, Jesse turned and flew into the net of the second controller.

"I got him Joe", the control officer said in his gray uniform.

"Molly had heard the alarm of Didi and Tidi and came tearing down out of the tree to swoop upon the control officer and so startled him he dropped the net as Swoots and Toots tried to wrap their bodies around each officer. Meanwhile, Harold and Cynthia the crows landed on the roof of the van and were crowing and cawing loudly and menacingly as Tidi and Didi ran at the two officers butting their tiny heads against their shins frightening them to their van and out of the park.

"We can handle those *upright worms*", Ronolo the frog croaked.

"They will be back", Mindeo hooted as he silently glided in among them.

The next morning a line of vehicles with the control officer's van leading the way was heading for the park. Ronolo and Sonolo

gave the alarm by hopping in circles and croaking near the entrance to the park.

"They're back! They're back!" Ronolo croaked.

A dozen vehicles rapidly moved into the parking lot. The *upright worms* were all wearing helmets with clear plastic visors over their faces. Cages were in the backs of several pick-up trucks. Carrying a long wide net through the park, the *upright worms* swept Tidi and Didi, Ronolo and Sonolo, Sweets and Toots, Fran and Fram into the net. Flying above the melee were Molly and Mindeo conversing how to conduct a defense during apparent defeat with the capture of many of their allies and followers.

Molly had a brainstorm while soaring above; she gave the order for all winged creatures secure a stone in their beaks that they would drop on the upright worms as well as their vehicles. Molly led blue jays and robins and came in low from the east while Mindeo came in higher from the west with the crows and cardinals. Molly developed a bombing technique by releasing her stone directly at the body of the *erect worms* rocketing over them at high speed. Mindeo released his stone high above the hard machines cracking the windshield of a pick-up truck. In a moment the flocks of crows and cardinals belted the vehicles fracturing and shattering windshields, causing hoods and roofs to be dented while the blue jays and robins deluged the *erect worms* with stones and pebbles hitting them on their bodies. A retreat to their conveyances turned into a rout by the upright worms that sped off in their hard damaged machines.

"They will be back", Mindeo hooted after they were all assembled in the gazebo.

"We will need a standing army to defend ourselves against the *erect worms*", Molly chirped.

"We must be vigilant at all times and patrol the perimeter of the park daily. We will have less time for other things as we once had. The price of freedom is high. It will be good if all the offspring are taken to a play area to be secure while we train to fight", Mindeo hooted with assurance.

An offspring care center was set up with Tidi and Didi alternating with Ronolo and Sonolo to take care of the young. Soon the broods and litters of robins, jays, crows, and woodpeckers were learning to burrow into the ground following Didi several feet to an underground storage chamber where a small quantity of nuts lay buried. The cardinals had not permitted their offspring to be taken from them, for they had found a way to train in the standing army while allowing their young to remain in the nest. There was a tradition of grand parenting. The grandparents cared for the little ones, nudging them and teaching them how to live, and the cardinals were not about to discard it as the other creatures so readily did. When Molly went to check on her two babies all the offspring were gone and she sent out an alarm that all the broods had been kidnapped. As the flocks of birds descended upon the park, the broods appeared out of a hole near the gazebo led by Tidi.

"What are you doing?" Molly chirped.

"I'm teaching the young ones the necessity of storing food for the long winter", Tidi squeaked.

"But we go south for the winter", Molly chirped.

In the late afternoon Ronolo and Sonolo took over watching the young ones immediately taking them to the pond near by. Ronolo had the little ones follow him into the pond as he hopped magnificently into the water making a neat splash diving underwater coming up several feet from the shoreline. The young feathered ones obediently mimicked Ronolo, but instead of swimming or diving effortlessly, they began to sink, shrieking and screeching for help. Molly heard the commotion of the young ones and attracted the other parents by flying above the water fluttering to and fro. Molly identified her two hatchlings and swooped down scooping in her beak first little Frace by his legs gently dropping him on dry land. Then she did the same for Drace placing her next to Frace. Soon all the other protective parents were in the air snatching their offspring from the water carrying them to safety.

A meeting was held in the gazebo after all the broods were rescued.

"It is the duty of each parent to take care of his own offspring. It is not the collective duty, for what the young learn ought to be from our own mouths", Molly chirped.

"The youngsters need to be taught by their families the basics of life in order to survive and be happy. If we leave that to others the young will no longer be our children, but they will be the children of strangers", Mindeo hooted.

Through a vote of wings and legs, it was agreed that the youngster no longer would be in the care of the collective center, but each parent would work very hard taking care of their own children like they always had in the past. The entire family was enlisted to take care of the young: grandparents, siblings and cousins. The grandparents imparted all their wisdom to the offspring who occasionally helped the grandparents with little chores, but the most important thing they gave each other was devotion and affection. It was a new dawn for the creatures, for they had overcome the *upright worms*. In the gazebo they debated their course of action for the coming days. Should they expand their domain beyond the park or not?

"We must begin to plan for the future", Mindeo said.

"We have two avenues to pursue, one of maintaining the park or to enlarge the area we control", Molly chirped to a full gazebo with wings flapping and beaks pointed in every direction.

"It is folly to go beyond the park, the *upright worms* have spread in such large numbers like leaves upon the trees it is folly to go against them outside the park. I have flown over their cities and buildings and towers of wires, which stretch across the landscape like a net", Harold the crow cawed.

"We must vote whether we stay here in the park or move forward outside the park", Molly chirped.

The vote was taken. Paws, wings and legs were raised. The vote was nearly unanimous in staying put, only Swoots and Toots were in favor of going outside the park and they had raised their heads high to signify approval to go beyond the park. Only one did not vote.

