

# Point of View

Perspectives from our Readers

## Snowdrift

I was the first to spot the weak fluttering in a bank of snow. At first, I thought it was a piece of trash blown into the yard by the raging north wind. It took only a moment to realize I was mistaken. Dashing out into the blizzard, I found a little female house sparrow suffering from severe hypothermia.

I recognized this bird. Missing an eye and unable to see me, several times she had allowed me to approach and fill the birdfeeder on which she perched. I had witnessed this feisty little girl fighting for her rightful place at the feeder, undaunted by the larger, stronger blue jays, cardinals, and mourning doves that sought to drive her away. I admired her spirit, her fierce determination to survive despite her handicap.

This admiration stemmed partly from my own experience with fighting for survival. Fourteen years ago, I was gravely injured when a bolt of lightning struck me in the neck. Had it not been for a stranger who saw my shattered body on the ground and called for help, I would not have lived.

Perhaps I should have allowed nature to take its course – survival of the fittest, and all that. A half-blind sparrow probably wouldn't survive in the wild for long. Were it not for our birdfeeder, I doubt this one would have survived. But then again, if that stranger in the parking lot all those years ago had looked at me and thought it better to let nature take its course, I wouldn't have survived, either. I couldn't bear to watch the little bird freeze to death outside my picture window. I gently scooped her out of the drift and carried her into the house.



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House sparrows aren't a native species here. They're alien invaders that compete with native birds for food and nesting sites. House sparrows were intentionally imported in the mid-1800s, as were European starlings forty years later. But the birds aren't the ones at fault for this. No one dreamed these alien invaders would compete with native birds for food and nesting sites. No harm was intended.

But can we say the same thing today? We destroy bird habitat every time we raze a forest or prairie to build a subdivision. We create food shortages when we spray our yards, roadsides, and farmlands with insecticides and pesticides that kill their natural food supply.

*I am one woman, I thought. I may not be able to single-handedly prevent the destruction of bird habitat or the spraying of pesticides, but I can help this bird.* I lit a candle and offered a prayer to Artemis, protectress of the wilderness, to watch over her small charge.

My daughter filled a hot water bottle while I wrapped the icy and seemingly lifeless little body in a soft towel. We took turns holding the swaddled bird and hot water bottle in our laps. Our old black labrador did her part too, her warm breath cascading over the tiny creature fighting for life on the wrong side of the picture window. If Snowdrift, as my daughter named her, was going to die, she was going to die warm.

Within an hour, Snowdrift was breathing normally again. Within two, she was taking a mixture of sugar and

soy milk from an eyedropper. By the end of the day, she was slowly hopping around, pecking at seeds I scattered in the aquarium incubator my daughter fixed up. She would eat three or four seeds, then tuck her head between her feet and fall into a deep sleep.

This greatly amused my daughter. "She looks like she fell asleep doing a somersault," she said. I agreed. Snowdrift looked like a narcoleptic circus performer who had fallen asleep in the middle of her act.

On day two, Snowdrift starting fluttering her wings gently, as though exercising them, testing their strength. She chirped softly to herself as she hopped around her pen. Her naps became less frequent, and by the end of the day, her head was tucked beneath her wing rather than between her feet when she slept.

On day three, her fluttering became lively, and her chirping took on a frantic urgency.

On day four, we let Snowdrift go. My daughter wept as the little bird, realizing she was no longer confined, spread her wings and took flight.

As far as my daughter and I were concerned, Snowdrift was no less a child of The Goddess than we were. To turn our backs on her and allow her to die in the cold would have been the same as turning our backs on The Goddess herself. Making the decision to try to save Snowdrift was really no different from the decision to keep birdfeeders in the first place. It was our way of honoring The Goddess and making the Earth a more beautiful place, one bird at a time. ▲

— *When not rescuing injured wildlife in her backyard, Smoky Trudeau writes about her relationship with Mother Gaia. She lives in Champaign, Illinois, with her husband, daughter, and a herd of animals, both tame and wild.*

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