

A Visit from Shivers

I was out for an early morning walk with Hester, our Black Lab, on a very raw January morning. I saw Hester quite intent on something on the ground. I found her sniffing a small, relatively flat cardboard box. I opened the box and saw what looked like a fur hat inside. I tilted the box and the fur hat started to slide out. I saw a tail, which seemed to be frozen solid, then back legs, which seemed to have been skinned; raw, painful and cold. Then came the body. It was a shock to find this to be a living animal, not a fur hat. There was life in this small bundle of fur, but it seemed to be on the thin side of living. I wondered what to do with this poor animal.

The animal was hurt, wounded, and freezing. By taking the animal into my care, was I becoming attached and getting in the way of Mother Nature's course? From the teachings of my meditative practise, I believed I was to be mindful of attachment, so I was striving for detachment. Here was a perfect opportunity for attachment. I decided that attached or not, I would try to help this poor creature, which turned out to be a muskrat. I picked up the box, tucked it under my arm, beneath my jacket, and headed home. As I walked home, I heard the odd squeak from the box. I tried to comfort and reassure the animal by humming softly, but felt helpless.

I arrived home and asked my wife Lori to get a box for this poor visitor. It didn't take long for the kids to gather round, wondering what was in the box. Seeing this poor, cold, bedraggled form in the box, it didn't take any time at all for their hearts to open to this poor creature. My son, Owen ran and got a warm towel for a covering. My son Ian saw this poor bundle in the box all covered up, still looking so cold. He suggested that our visitor should be named Shivers. We all wanted to nurture and warm Shivers back to health and wholeness, but I decided Shivers needed to go to the veterinary clinic.

At the vet clinic, they suggested a warm saline IV to try and warm Shivers' cold body and went to get it ready. Shivers was in a small room, lying on a glove to keep the cold of the table from Shivers' body. It was just the two of us together in that small room. I was there only as a witness, helpless.

The technician returned with a syringe of warm saline for Shivers. I stayed with Shivers for a little while longer. Then I turned away to leave with a prayer heavy in my heart for the well being of one of God's wounded. I asked them to phone me to let me know how Shivers made out. As I approached the door, a huge lump formed in my throat. I couldn't speak. My eyes watered and filled with tears. I just stumbled out the door.

I got a call shortly after saying that Shivers didn't make it. Shivers was dead.

I only knew Shivers for about forty-five minutes. Yet Shivers had made such an impact upon my life and my family. Shivers touched me through the vulnerability, loneliness and stark nakedness of our encounter on that cold morning. Seeing an animal dying alone really tugged at my heart and my soul, at something buried deep down in the very core of my being. It touched my own mortality. This encounter certainly destroyed the myth of detachment I often labor under. I believe we connected as two of God's creatures on that stark plain of shared Spirit, Life, and Body. We were together for that brief moment in time.

I shed a lot of tears over Shivers that day. I've shed a lot of tears over Shivers since. With all the worries and responsibilities I had, deadlines and the busy-ness of life, I found myself writing about Shivers.

That night, Ian, Owen, Lori and I said a prayer for Shivers. Andrew, our youngest, prayed his prayer in his innocence, falling asleep before the rest of us. Shivers did Spiritual Care for me and I did Spiritual Care for Shivers. We shared. It was a broken relationship that healed. Shivers left me with a new way of looking at life. Shivers gave my family a new way of experiencing life on passing through. We connected through a common identity of being part of God's creation, each of us created and creating in the image of God. In God's tally sheet, perhaps it was a holy transaction based in compassion and love.

Shivers, thank-you.