

THE CAMBRIAN

Pacing Through the Pines

John FitzRandolph
February 14-20, 2008

Hats off, hearts
out to PWC



WWW.CERRILLOSILLS.ORG/R.SAVANNAH

A hearty hat's off to you, St. Valentine. Here's looking at you, kid. Thank you from the four chambers of our collective hearts, whoever you were. Today we send 100,000 notes of deep appreciation - one for each time the human heart beats daily - to you, worthy saint. Muchas gracias, danke, merci beaucoup, for whatever your role was in launching this warm human glow that explodes on the 14th day of the second month.

It's a pity that luminosity can't be present every day, but we'll take what we can get. Year after year Cambrians - and folks elsewhere in droves - send thoughtful gifts to those we love. Today this reporter departs from the romantic genre, sending a valentine to Pacific Wildlife Care (PWC) in Morro Bay.

To the kindly PWC team: all who genuinely care when a natural world creature is injured salute you on Valentine's Day.

Two weeks ago today, the call came in around noon. A gray fox lay in the street at the corner of Pickwick Lane and Roscoe Place in Cambria. The poor creature had collided with a car and a thoughtful neighbor called the folks at animal control. They urged that PWC be notified.

As an occasional volunteer PWC driver, I exceeded the speed limit (and rolled through a stop sign) rushing to the scene. There was a beautiful adult gray fox, alive but struggling.

Its exquisiteness notwithstanding, the eyes reflected pathos and fear. When we attempted to put a towel over it to gather it up for rescue, the fox rose awkwardly to its feet and stumbled away. We followed it down steep steps beside a neighbor's house.

The critter's energy waned as we quickly caught up, corralled the fox softly, and gently set it in a cardboard box. We poked air holes in the side of the box and I turned my Honda Element south on Highway 1 with the intensity of an ambulance driver.

Indeed, that's what I was in an ad hoc kind of way. Heavy on my mind was the gruesome thought of a 3,500-pound hunk of sheet metal hitting a lithe 10 pound fox at say, 35 mph.

Ouch. Even at 15 mph, how frightening for a wily natural world creature crossing a street to be so suddenly and brutally hammered. My mind painted descriptive pictures as I envisioned how horrific the thud, how unjust, how terrible the internal injuries that fox in the box in my car must have suffered.

Did the driver know he or she just hit a fox? I reflected on how many birds and deer are killed each year by cars, and how many times I barely missed slamming into that tawny doe innocently trying to keep up with it's family members across a busy road. "Deer in the headlights" indeed.

Skirting along Estero Bay just south of Cayucos, I was about to pass a steel blue Toyota going 65 mph. Just ahead of us as I pulled even with the Toyota's back bumper - 50 feet in the air - three seagulls battled over a scrap of food.

It was a dramatic in-flight fracas. Wings flapped furiously as they skirmished - until the morsel fell to the pavement a hundred feet directly in front of the onrushing Toyota. "No don't!" I shouted as one of the big white birds dived to the ground.

Okay, part of me thought, it's just a ubiquitous scavenging seagull. But boom, my heart skipped several beats as I witnessed the bird struck by the Toyota. Thud.

Expecting instant flattened road ill, I was shocked as the gull hurtled spinning, whirling, in a surreal trajectory across my windshield and into the green strip of median, still rotating several times as it landed.

Shaken, I hurriedly delivered the fox to PWC. Heading back to Cambria - fingers crossed for the fox - the slow-motion replay of the seagull's demise haunted me.

Next day I learned that the injured fox had died. About half of the wounded creatures delivered to PWC cannot be saved. But what never dies is the courage, compassion and mercy that radiates from the hearts and helping hands of the PWC volunteers.

This valentine's for you, Pacific Wildlife Care.

If you are interested in volunteering, or if you find an injured animal or bird, call 543-WILD (9453).

Freelance resident John FitzRandolph writes a biweekly column for The Cambrian. Email him at johnfitz44@yahoo.com