



## A Fledgling Hummingbird Story

This past July, one hot and sunny late afternoon, Well staff member Mary Fishman was looking out her second floor window across to a beautiful maple tree that harbors all sorts of birds, when out of the corner of her eye, she spotted a hummingbird, poking at something on the ground under the tree's canopy. What was it? The hummingbird flew off, and Mary saw something little and dark, on top of the hard dirt, in the blazing sun.

Sure enough, when she went down to check, it was a baby hummingbird, lying on its side, with feathers, and it was alive! Mary's motherly instinct was to move the bird onto the grass and in the shade, a few feet from where it lay. So she picked up the tiny creature and laid her in a better spot (she thought), trusting that Mom would take care of her.

Back upstairs, finishing up work, Mary paused to look out the window, and saw the mother bird hovering around the spot where the bird had lain originally! She couldn't find her baby. So Mary packed up, went downstairs, and put the bird back where she had found her. Driving off, she thought, "I can't just leave her there! What if the mother won't come back now that I have handled her? How do I even know the

mother is feeding her? She will starve." So instead of turning toward home, she drove to Pet Supplies Plus in La Grange. A clerk helped her find the one last bottle of hummingbird nectar, and a dropper kit for feeding baby animals.

In the meantime, her friend and coworker Roberta had done a little internet research. She found out that hummingbirds have no sense of smell, so parents won't reject a baby because they have been handled by humans. When Mary returned, the bird was still where she had left her, in the dirt, but there was no sign of Mom. So once more, Mary picked her up, and held her in one hand while squeezing the nectar from the dropper with the other hand, onto the tip of the bird's beak. After a few squeezes, the bird opened her beak and Mary could see her long tongue, lapping up the juice.

The food seemed to give her more energy- she let out some little chirping sounds, and fluffed her wings, in a flying motion. Just like a baby, she seemed drowsy after she was fed (just a few drops), settling down and almost dozing off. It was other-worldly, holding this tiny bird in her hands. When her eyes were open, the bird kept them on Mary's face, looking at her eyes- she knew that Mary was alive, too. She couldn't really stand yet, but she did grab onto Mary's finger with her tiny claws. Time seemed to stop.

Dusk was approaching. What to do now? Mary had another lifeline to draw upon - a friend known to many at The Well, who lives nearby, loves and knows a lot about animals. Edie arrived and after marveling with Mary at this tiny beautiful bird, they decided it was best to leave her overnight in the tree she had fallen from. At least she wouldn't get eaten by a fox, or run over by a lawn mower the next day! So they placed her in the crotch of the maple tree, about 5 feet off the ground, on a bed of grass, and said good night. Mary felt transported into a different consciousness, that whole night and into the next day.

The next morning, Mary checked on her little fledgling. There she was in the tree, where they had left her. She had survived the night! And she wasn't interested in the dropper anymore. Later that day Mary happened to see the mother hummingbird as she was leaving the "nest." She must be feeding her baby!

That day Mary and Roberta had a short call with an expert from an animal rescue center. He told them that given that the bird had feathers but wasn't flying yet, she was a "teenager" - what you would call a fledgling. A hummingbird's nest is so tiny, and the babies grow so fast, he said, that they can become too big for the nest and tumble out, before they are ready to fly and feed themselves. A hummingbird parent will continue to feed a fledgling who has fallen to the ground. These birds are small but they are tough, he added. The fledgling would need a few more days before she would be ready to fly. He said it was the right thing to do to move her from the ground, and that Mom would take care of her from this point on.

And she did. One day, after a few days where her human family had continued to check on her, the little bird was no longer in the tree. The "miracle of flight" had learned to fly!

Life is full of miracles, large and small. No wonder we love it so much! We make an impact on a life just by paying attention, seeing what might be needed, offering love and care, and then trusting that life to go on and become what it is meant to be. Maybe someday that hummingbird will stop by and look Mary in the eye again. Wouldn't that be a miracle?!

*by Mary Fishman*