

# The View From Heifer Hill—August 2021

## Life of Pye



Pye's life probably started like most beavers' lives do, in a dark dome lodge on a bed of shredded vegetation among siblings and doting parents, water lapping at the entry tunnel. I cannot guess what change of fortunes next occurred, but as a yearling, she was found, alone and badly injured. The injuries were consistent with the bite marks of a predator.

If Pye could tell the story of what happened to her next, she would tell it by a campfire at night; it would be a tale of alien abduction. While she lay injured and unable to flee, giant bipeds grabbed her with long-fingered arms, stuffed her in a crate, and transported her to a small land of smooth surfaces and corners. There she was probed and manipulated and subjected to painful treatments. This captivity and torture lasted for an eternity (two months).

It may be that Pye's story would not include the gradual transition from pain to greater comfort and mobility since that transition was too slow to notice. She would have noticed the morning when a giant picked her up, stuffed her into a

box again, and transported her to a new land of smooth surfaces and corners. There was another beaver in this land, one known to some of you, dear readers, and me, as Pumpkin.

Pumpkin has grown up in this vegetation-free world. Giant bipeds are members of his family. If he could tell his story, he would tell it while reclining on a therapist's couch. He would include his mother's disappearance, foster care, the death of his siblings, a move to another foster home, a fight with the other kid there, and a return to his original foster home. I want to think he would have mostly nice things to say about me, his foster mother. I'm doing my best.

A tenet of wildlife rehabilitation is to strive to raise orphans with other members of their species. This companionship is comforting and helps eliminate confusion about species identity. In the case of beavers, the young must be siblings or two young of the opposite sex. With any other configuration, once the territorial drive kicks in, as it does when beavers are young, they will fight.

Pye arrived about a month ago. While Pumpkin was eager to be her friend, she demanded a wide security buffer. She stood and huffed fiercely whenever he ventured near her. The first night, Pumpkin pushed a berm of sticks and straw around her. Was he damming her out or building her a bower? I still don't know.

Very slowly, Pye's security buffer has diminished. She still huffs whenever Pumpkin or I get too close, but we both know these are mostly bluff. She seems to enjoy it when I groom her. She stretches out and rests her chin on the straw, and leans in when I hit a good spot. Pumpkin pretends to ignore her threats and plops himself down near her to go about his beaver business.

Today, when he wheeled and galumphed away in a moment of excitement, Pye, emboldened, leaped after him and gave him a little punch with her nose. Pumpkin wasn't much put off and came right back to be near her.

What comes next? I plan to move them to a fenced pond where they can build a lodge, dig in the mud, and practice some of their beaver skills. If things go as I hope they will, I will release Pumpkin and Pye together next spring. If these beavers could tell their stories, a year or two hence, they would tell them in a dark dome lodge on a bed of shredded vegetation with their squeaky offspring gathered around. That would be a happy ending.

