The Dog and the Turkey

This story is a true account of an intriguing relationship between a dog and a turkey. Both animals are therapy animals who help children and youth at risk or with multiple mental health diagnoses and behavioral issues. They often model the concept of bullying with their natural, bizarre interactions.

“Gobble, gobble gobble!” “Gobble gobble gobble!” O how I hate when I hear him do it twice in a row! Especially when he’s out on the front deck where the dog sleeps. Ever since the very first day when Bob, our wild Thom turkey, came to live with us he picked on the dogs. Picked on? I’m not sure that’s what he does but from day one, Bob pecked at the dogs. I thought he was helping because it was summer and there were a lot of mosquitoes on the dogs. But now, two and half years later…I don’t think he is really trying to help.

Here’s what happens. Axle, our black Labrador Retriever, is usually lying down relaxing and minding his own business. Whenever Bob spots him he makes a bee line for him and the harassing begins. He starts with the double gobble and then he makes this high pitched “tweet tweet” sounds that goes on and on and on. Axle will usually get up because Bob will stand over him and do this until he does. Once Axle begins to move, Bob is in hot pursuit. Where Axle goes, Bob goes, all the while making his tweet sound and staring Axle right in the eye. They are about the same height. Axle tries to ignore him. He looks away and just keeps walking but Bob cannot let go. Eventually, Axle will growl at Bob to tell him to go away but that only makes Bob crane his neck all the way up to be taller and bigger than Axle. If no one intervenes, Axle will grab Bob by his neck eventually and pin him to the ground. If there is no audience, Bob will go away and leave Axle alone. If people are watching, Bob will flap his wings in Axle’s face and “turkey breast” him. The fight is on.

Wow. I don’t really know why they do this but my theory is that Axle is very bonded to me and so is Bob. I think Bob thinks I am his “woman” because he also behaves this way with my husband and my full time staff. Anyone who is here regularly gets the wrath of Bob but he is the sweetest most lovable guy to me and hundreds of little kids and youth.

Due to this natural, conflictual relationship that Bob and Axle share, they have helped many siblings understand the dynamics in their own families. One of the things I hear the most here at the program is one sibling telling another to “stop being like Bob.” Bob and Axle also help people to deal with fear and to learn to trust as it can be quite scary but if people just stay out of the way, Bob and Axle will always sort it out and no one gets hurt.
Bob and Axle have been invited to go to schools to talk about bullying. They provide a concrete and physical demonstration about what a bully looks like, what he does and how the “victim” is targeted. Axle provides a healthy solution to ways to deal with bullying and when his avoidance efforts are unproductive he meets Bob where he is and ends the conflict. It is quite amazing to watch.

Interestingly, when people who are here for therapy are crying or angry, Bob and Axle do not partake in their usual routine. They generally both stand by and try to help the person who is upset. Bob will fluff all up and pirouette for the person to try and draw their attention to him and Axle will lay down by their feet and stare up at them with his big sad eyes in an effort to help. They work as a team and put their issues aside to provide as much support to the person as possible. They are quite a conundrum!

We love both animals tons and lots and just wished they loved each other as much. If you have children who tease each other, fight with each other, argue constantly, etc., then you have to meet Bob and Axle. If you have a brother or sister who bugs you like this or a friend at school who is always bullying you, then you have to meet Bob and Axle. Bullying happens in all species, not just people. It is a natural way of the animal kingdom but that does not make it ok or easy to deal with. Wow, who would have ever thought that I’d be spending most of my days breaking up fights between a dog and a turkey that can get along great if people are unhappy?

*Dreamcatcher has been in operation since 2003. It is run by a Registered Psychologist and currently has 35 fur or feathered rescued or adopted animals all of whom come with their own life story, personal issues and life obstacles. At Dreamcatcher, rescued and once homeless animals who have been specially screened and chosen as co-counsellors are partnering with children and youth to help them overcome their life issues, whatever they might be. Together, young people are healing animals and animals are healing young people.*

*Eileen Bona is a Registered Psychologist and the Owner/Founder of Dreamcatcher Nature-Assisted Therapy Ltd, a private practice working with animals in a natural setting to help children, youth and adults who have disabilities or mental health diagnoses. For more information, visit online: [www.dreamcatcherassociation.com](http://www.dreamcatcherassociation.com).*