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Interspecies love, it's a strange place to be in at this stage of life. With the exception of my wife, the individual to whom I'm most intimately attached has four legs, a beard, a thick wiry coat of fur and has laid protectively across my legs all weekend while I've drifted in and out with the flu.

Just to be clear: She's a dog. But *what* a dog. She's an Irish wolfhound, 170 pounds of head nurse. She loves me. I can tell because she waits until I'm conscious to go through my pockets.

Okay, Nurse Oona is a bit of a pirate. She likes to lay on her back like a bug, waving her great legs in the air. She lets me share part of my meals with her, then says thanks with withering clouds of green gas. But to me, she's a delicate flower. I crave her touch.

Ours is another example of interspecies love. Most Irish wolfhound companions are quite familiar with it. Here are ancient hounds bred to chase down and kill dangerous large game. Tales of their devastating ferocity abound in Irish myth. I'm aware of this as I lay pressed into the couch by her giant paw while she tongue bathes my face until my skin is raw. Those teeth are *humongous*. Yet her touch is gentle and loving and I trust her. I *want* her near me.

Nature has done what it can to encourage interspecies love, to see that humans and dogs bond. It's achieved effectively through the hormone oxytocin, the feel-good hormone. Research has measured spikes in both human and canine oxytocin levels when a dog and its human simply look one another in the eye. It leaps as much as 300% when we hold each other.

Oxytocin receptivity varies wildly between breeds. Some breeds are aloof because they lack it. Apparently Irish wolfhounds are incredibly sensitive to it because their bondedness to their humans is legendary and unshakeable. It's just another reason why Irish wolfhound companions are passionate about our breed.

Google "interspecies love" and you'll find two types of articles. One is lists of touching cases of one animal adopting another of a different species: a foxhound who adopted a fox; a boxer who nurtures a baby goat; Henrietta the chicken, who bonded with a litter of Rottweilers. The list goes on and on. It's a Disney moment but we secretly grit our teeth and hope that something doesn't go horribly wrong because in most cases these are species that normally eat one another. Yet the usual rules have been suspended by love.

Researchers say every species craves company and has a degree of empathy. They recognize fear, pain and loneliness in others. Love overcomes the usual urge to snack.

Your googling will also lead you to a second type of cautionary article which calls interspecies love a “dangerous myth.” Teach children to love all animals and they’ll be eaten by bears one day, you just wait and see. They speak of the dangers of anthropomorphism, the practice of assigning human traits and feelings to animals.

And it’s a valid point. For example, you come home and your dog looks at you with what you assume is guilt. He knows you’re about to find your sneakers that he mangled while you were away. You may punish him with a sharp swat. You assumed he knew it was wrong and by gosh he did it anyway. *Bad* dog!

Actually, he ate your sneakers because they were *there* and he did what a dog does. They smelled so good and he was bored. Chewing helped pass the time. Then Fido remembered how bonkers you went the last time he chewed up what he thought was fair game. He’d never been told specifically otherwise. That look he gave you when you came in the door was fear of the unstable human. And you just reinforced it. Anthropomorphism misled you. Fido’s a dog, not a Disney character and not a human child.

And all this is fine. *See* the dog. But the people who wave the anthropomorphism flag tend to be a parsimonious bunch unwilling to see that animals can ever feel deeper love, be altruistic or have any higher ethics. I doubt any of them have ever met an Irish wolfhound.

Because, when I’m with Oona I don’t forget for a second that she’s a member of another species. None of my friends can sprint 40 mph. None of them have tails that can double you over with a casual snap. Not one of my friends has even knocked me into a wall lovingly leaning against me, not even when they were three sheets to the wind.

None of my friends has ever staggered me with a look. In my girl's eyes I see the wilderness calling, I see the simmering intelligence of a mighty carnivore and I see a raw, undiluted love that sometime shakes me. I see The Other looking back at me and I'm humbled.

And then she wallows her great head in my lap, draws me closer with a giant paw and all is right in my world. I don't even mind her snout rooting in my pockets for treats. I understand her. She knows me. We love each other without barriers.