

Fellow Mortals™



"He has taught me to make of a refrigerator a cliff,
a spiral staircase a sky"
—Margaret Weis

Wildlife Rehabilitation

MAGELLAN

He sits high atop the white cliff that is the refrigerator, watching intently as the staff prepares dinner for the nighthawks. He is Magellan, a peregrine falcon, bright and alert, quick to notice everything that is happening in his world that is a kitchen. He receives a bit of steak when the preparations are finished, tears it apart with his sharp beak, and then leaves his cliff to explore the rest of his world, a world that is so much smaller than the world into which he was born. He travels his world on foot—this fleet denizen of the skies—for he can no longer fly.

The falcon's handicap may have grounded his body, but it has not grounded his spirit. He was named Magellan for his propensity to go exploring. He is interested in everything in his world. He toddles across the floor to look through the door at the three squirrel siblings rolling and rousting and tussling in their cage. One wonders at his thoughts. "Stupid squirrels!" perhaps. He does not trust the beaver and keeps a close eye on her, to make certain she stays in her own territory. He watches closely all the food preparation from his aerie on top of the refrigerator.

Magellan was found in the road in Fontana in 1999. He was presumably struck by a car, although no one knows for certain what might have happened to him. He suffered a compound fracture of the right humerus. The staff at *Fellow Mortals* knew immediately that he would never fly again. But they thought that they might be able to save his life.

Because the peregrine falcon was, in 1999, a member of an endangered species (they have since been removed from that list, although they are still considered "threatened"), the staff had to call the U.S. Fish and Wildlife agency to receive permission to work to save him, for it is illegal to keep a peregrine falcon in captivity. Permission was granted. Once the raptor was stabilized, Dr. Pat Hourigan amputated the wing, saving as much as possible of the humerus in order to give Magellan balance when perching and moving. The staff called the government agency to report that the surgery had been successful, Magellan would recover and would soon be ready for placement in a permanent facility.

The permit officer asked Yvonne if *Fellow Mortals* would like to keep Magellan—a singular honor, indicating a high level of trust in the staff and their ability to properly care for the maimed bird.

Because the staff hopes to be able to use Magellan in education programs, the bird was placed in the food preparation area of one of the buildings at *Fellow Mortals*. The staff hopes that by locating him in this busy location, where he is around people on a daily basis, they will teach Magellan to trust his caregiver and accustom him to being around strangers.

When I enter his world, Magellan is perched on his specially built spiral "staircase" perch. I am new and unfamiliar to him and he does not want me entering into his world. He starts to shiver and his eyes dart about, searching for a way to escape. Yvonne talks soothingly to him, but he is not comforted. Moving slowly, I sidle past him, trying not to look at him (difficult, for he is so sleek and bright-eyed).

I am too close. Magellan takes to the air...and lands with an outraged squawk on the floor. I hear him rustling and grumbling back to his perch. I pay my respects to the beaver in a bucket and then ease past Magellan on my way out. He has climbed back up on his "staircase" and he eyes me balefully from behind one of the perches. I sense his bright eyes on me the entire way out. I am a disruptive influence in his new world and he is glad to be rid of me.

If Magellan had been in the wild, he would have taken wing to shriek proud defiance at me as he spiraled among the clouds. Or perhaps he might not have paid any attention to me at all. Viewed from those soaring heights that were once his world, I

would be nothing to him, of less interest than a mouse. Now he is part of my earth-bound world and I am part of his.

I hope Magellan does become an "educator" bird. He has a lesson to teach us. Not only lessons about endangered species and falcons in general, but lessons about living life as it is meted out to us, about adapting to new situations. I am sorry that Magellan will never have the chance to ride the thermals or feel the rush of the wind as he dives for his prey. But I am not sorry for Magellan. He does not ask for my pity.

In his situation, I might be tempted to sit on my perch and sulk. Instead, he has taught me a lesson.

He has taught me to make of a refrigerator a cliff, a spiral staircase a sky.

Guest writer, Author Margaret Weis

