

In Bed

Skin on fur, hand on paw, hip to hip. Body to body.

In 2009, Meg Daley Olmert published the book *Made for Each Other – the Biology of the Human-Animal Bond*, a book that described in depth the bond between man and animal. With the aid of the latest research findings within the fields of neuroscience, zoology and anthropology, she describes, among other things, the neuro-chemical processes that reinforce the bond between man and animal. She explains, for example, that when we pet our dog, the production of the hormone oxytocin increases in a manner identical to when a mother holds her baby. Furthermore, body contact between humans and other mammals also accelerates the healing of wounds, stabilizes the blood pressure, lowers the level of stress hormones and alleviates both physical and mental pain.

This book was a real treasure to find, as it so distinctly describes the biology of both man and animal in relation to each other. Previously, that which I personally experienced with animals was something I could only discuss with certain friends and acquaintances. We exchanged experiences and thoughts with regard to our animals. This can be difficult to do on a more general level, as it is often seen as something subjective, as something having to do with one's private life.

But could the fact that we own pets in record numbers in the Western world nowadays have to do with a fundamental need among human beings for contact with other mammals? A need that, in the present day and age, is fulfilled to a far lesser degree due to the fact that farmers are becoming fewer, and those who raise animals now work on a more industrial level. Fifty years ago, there were still many small scale farms with a few cows, pigs, chickens, sheep, a dog, maybe a work horse and cats for keeping the mice and rats at bay. The farmer would pet the cows in the stable, and the kids always had animals to cuddle and play with.

Thankfully, I was brought up under similar circumstances. We didn't have a real farm, my parents made ends meet through other means, but we were self-sufficient; there was always a cow, some chickens, a sow who would have piglets once a year, a few goats, cats and a dog. As a child, I would seek consolation with my dog, or with the cow or calf I'd be caring for at the time, the way girls groom their horses. My parents were always working, and were overstressed just as many parents are today. They didn't really have time to hug and cozy up with us children in the sofa.

I believe it's been this way for eons, that parents have been extremely involved in work, leaving the children to play and rest with, say, the pet dog. During the night, people would lay close to one another, thus fulfilling their need for body contact, making oxytocin flow. There are photographs from the early

1900s featuring Aborigines from Australia lying tightly together in a circle formation, with the children at the centre, surrounded by adults and tame dingos. "A three dog night" is still a usual expression in Australia, referring to the need of up to three dogs to keep warm on a cold night. As we in the Western world have become increasingly wealthy with more living space at our disposal, children are expected to sleep in their own beds, and their own rooms, with the adult bed becoming all the more sexualized over time. It has become the norm that individuals without sexual partners tend to sleep alone. There is a need for animals to live and sleep with.

There are several reasons why I have chosen to describe the physical contact between animal and man, specifically while in bed. Rest and sleep as phenomena has been of special interest to me for many years. It can be hard to achieve and a resting animal or human is quite beautiful, so enveloped in themselves as they sleep. The bed is also the calmest place in a home, as well as the most intimate, and hence, being granted access to photograph there has been interesting for me.

The image here features my husband Niels lying next to my old dog Ivan, whose favorite sleeping position was under the blanket at Niels's crotch, and over the years, many photos have been taken of Ivan just there, in that spot, although I have never intended to show these images in public. But when I later decided to work on this "In Bed" series, I knew it simply had to start with Ivan. Over the course of his almost sixteen-year life, he helped me find my way back to that feeling of total security, that I only knew in those instances when curled up next to my dog as a child.

Lisa Strömbeck, October 2015