

The language of the Heart

Soapy Smith is a twenty—four—pound calico¹⁾ rex²⁾ rabbit. A rex rabbit's coat lacks the stiff guard hairs of other breeds³⁾, resulting in a fur texture that is as soft as a cloud. People look startled when they first touch him and remark how soft he is. I've noticed he seems to make everyone who meets him a little softer, too.

One day, Soapy Smith and I visited a shelter for battered women located in a bedraggled⁴⁾ section of the city. The women in the shelter looked at me through downcast⁵⁾ eyes. No one smiled a greeting, and they appeared uninterested in Soapy's carrier. Everyone seemed tense and ready to flee. One little girl in particular moved like a wisp⁶⁾ in the background. Never raising her eyes, near reaching out, she drifted in and out of the gathered group. The staff informed me that she had been there for over a month and had not spoken the entire time. Nothing they tried had any effect. Her mother said she had talked at one time but not in recent memory. I didn't want to imagine what could have happened to rob this little girl of the natural curiosity and enthusiasm so natural to childhood.

Spreading a blanket on the floor, I sat down and opened Soapy's carrier. As the silent child circled past me, I told the group that Soapy would come to talk to them if they sat on his blanket. Several children did this, including the silent girl. In a short time, Soapy emerged from his carrier and slowly hopped from one child to another. Unlike visits at schools where the first touches produced squeals of delight, this visit was unusually quiet. After touching Soapy, these children looked down and sighed softly or smiled into their hands. Soapy continued his rounds, and the children and their mothers gradually began to talk about Soapy and ask questions.

I chatted with the women and children as I kept one eye on the little girl. She sat rigidly at the edge of the blanket, legs held stiffly out straight in front of her. She was staring hard at Soapy. It appeared that he kept making eye contact with her. He would hop from child to child, each visit taking him closer to the girl. I began to wonder if he was pausing to give her time to watch him. During all other visits we had given together in schools, his usual behavior was to hop around the circle letting each person pet him. When he got back to me he would wash his face and then start the circle again.

That day, I watched as Soapy finally worked his way toward the girl. She didn't reach out to him or encourage him in any way. Rather she sat tensely, just staring.

Finally Soapy came to a stop about two inches from her thigh⁷⁾. He quietly reached out and laid his chin on her knee. I was astonished. While a common behavior for dogs, this is not a behavior exhibited by rabbits, especially not by this rabbit.

The child did not reach out to pet Soapy. Instead, she slowly leaned toward him. When her face was within inches of his, she carefully reached out and circled him with her arms. So softly that no one in the room could hear, she began to talk. Folded around the rabbit, she pillowed her head on⁸⁾ his back and whispered to him. Soapy remained motionless.

I looked up and noticed that the shelter workers had stopped talking. Every adult in the room froze in place. Time seemed suspended. Then quietly the child unfolded and sat back

up. Soapy sat up too, reached forward and briskly licked her knee. She did not smile. She did not reach out to him, but the rigidity of her back relaxed, and her shoulders rounded into a comfortable slope⁹). The little girl stood up and walked over to her mother and began to suck her thumb.

The little girl reappeared when I was preparing to leave. She reached her hands out and looked me directly in the eye. I held Soapy out to her. She wrapped him in a big hug and pressed her face against him. Suspended from my hands as he was, I was concerned that he would begin to struggle. Instead he reached out his head again and laid it on the child's shoulder. His breathing slowed and he closed his eyes. As quickly as it happened, the little girl released her hug and stepped back. As she turned away, I thought I saw the beginnings of a faint smile.

The rabbit in his cloud of soft, warm fur had touched something deep in the child—something that had died from too much hard experience. Soapy's innocence and trust appeared to kindle those very same qualities in the little girl.

Numerous times, I've seen how the loving presence of an animal can heal where words have no effect. It seems the language of the heart is simple after all.

□by Maureen Fredrickson

心灵的语言

索皮·史密斯是只24磅重的卷毛花兔。卷毛兔没有其他种类的兔子那种有防护作用的硬毛，它的毛轻软得像云彩。人们第一次触摸索皮时，个个都很惊讶，说它真软。我注意到它似乎使每一个见到它的人也变得温柔了些。

有一天，我和索皮·史密斯去位于城区破败不堪角落里的一个收容所，看望那里的受虐妇女。她们用沮丧的眼神看着我。没有人微笑表示欢迎，对装着索皮的提箱也不感兴趣；个个显得精神紧张，准备随时逃离。尤其有个小女孩，在人身后像一阵清风似地走动。她始终不抬眼睛，也不接近别人，只是飘飘忽忽地来到聚集在一起的妇女们中间，又飘飘忽忽地离去。这里的员工告诉我，那女孩已经来了一个多月，这期间她一语未发。不论他们怎么试，她就是不开口。她妈妈说，她曾说过话，可那是很久以前的事了。我不想臆测发生过什么，竟然剥夺了这个小女孩的好奇和热情，而那是儿童的天性。

我在地上铺了块毯子，然后坐下，把装索皮的提箱打开。那个不说话的女孩在我身旁绕过时，我告诉大家，如果她们坐在毯子上，索皮会和她们交谈。有几个孩子坐下了，包括那个不说话的女孩。索皮很快就从提箱里出来了，慢慢地从一个孩子跳到另一个孩子。不像带索皮去学校，一摸它，孩子们就高兴得发出尖叫，这回异乎寻常地安静。这些孩子摸了索皮之后，眼睛朝下看，轻声叹息或双手捂住脸笑。索皮继续绕着圈走动，孩子们和她们的妈妈逐渐开始谈论索皮，而且还提出问题。

我一边和那些妇女和孩子们聊着，一边注意着那小女孩。她僵直地坐在毯子边上，僵硬地伸出两条腿，聚精会神地凝视着兔子。索皮似乎和她保持着目光接触。它从一个孩子蹦到另一个孩子，每绕过一个孩子，它就越来越靠近那女孩。我纳闷，索皮是不是为了给她时间，让她注意它而停步。我们去学校和孩子们见面时，索皮通常是绕着圈子蹦跳，让每个孩子拍摸它。回到我这边以后，它会洗干净脸，再继续绕圈。

那天，我看到索皮终于走向那女孩。她没有伸手，也没有任何鼓励索皮的动作或表情，

而只是紧张地坐着，凝视着它。

最后，索皮在离她腿两英寸的地方停了下来。它悄悄地伸出脖子，把下巴搁在那女孩的膝上。我惊呆了。这对狗来说是个寻常的动作，可不是兔子的行为，尤其不是这只兔子该有的举动。

那孩子没有伸手摸索皮，而是慢慢地朝索皮俯下身。在她的脸离索皮的只有不到几英寸时，她轻轻地伸出手，双臂抱住了它。她开始说话了，声音轻柔得屋里没有人能听得见。她抱住兔子，把头枕在它背上，和静静呆着的索皮窃窃私语。

我抬起头，看到收容所工作人员不再说话。屋里每个成年人都呆了。时间似乎停滞不前了。然后那女孩轻轻地收回两臂，又坐直了。索皮也坐了起来，往前挪动，轻快地舔她的膝盖。她没有笑，也没伸出手来，可她的背放松了，肩膀也有了看着舒适的斜度。她站了起来，走向她妈妈，开始吮吸自己的大拇指。

我准备走的时候，那小女孩又出现了。她伸出手，直视着我。我把索皮递给她，她紧紧地抱着它，把脸紧贴在它身上。它被别人举在手里，我担心它会挣扎。可是它非但没有挣扎，反而伸直身子，把头落在女孩的肩膀上。索皮的呼吸变得缓慢了，它闭上了眼睛。此时小女孩松开了手，往后退了几步。她转身离开时，我想我看见她脸上开始露出微弱的笑意。

这只兔子一身皮毛，软软的、暖暖的，它触动了孩子心灵深处因无数痛苦经历而消失的感情。索皮的天真和信赖看来燃起了那小女孩同样的情感。

我无数次见证过，一只充满爱意的动物的出现如何医治言语未能奏效的创伤。看来，心灵的语言是最简单的。

NOTE 注释：

calico ['kælikəu] adj. 有斑点的

rex [reks] n. 雷克斯猫(一种鬃毛家猫，产于英国康沃尔和德文)

breed [bri:d] n. 种，属，种族

bedraggled [brɪ'dræg(ə)ld] adj. 破烂的，破旧的

downcast ['daunkɑ:st] adj. (目光)低垂的，垂头丧气的

wisp [wisp] n. 纤弱的人，细微(或缥缈)的东西

thigh [θai] n. 大腿，股

pillow... on 依靠在...

slope [sləup] n. 斜坡，斜度