

Grizzly Times Podcast
Transcript
Episode 44
Dr. Gay Bradshaw
June, 2020

Louisa Willcox: This is Louisa Willcox with Grizzly Times, and I am delighted to be here today with Gay Bradshaw. Dr. Gay Bradshaw is a psychologist, ecologist and pioneer researcher on animal trauma and wildlife self-determination. Her work with elephants, parrots, apes and a slew of other species led her to found the field of trans-species psychology. Gay's latest book Talking with Bears: Conversations with Charlie Russell is about the rancher, filmmaker and acclaimed writer who has challenged our way of thinking about and relating to wild animals, especially grizzly bears. And I should confess upfront too that Charlie Russell was a good friend of mine and my husband David, and we're both deeply moved by how beautifully Gay captured Charlie's life and passion.

And thanks for being here today Gay.

Gay Bradshaw: No, thank you.

L: So your new book Talking with Bears builds on a significant body of work about how human-induced trauma in wild animals can harm them. Before we dive into the grizzly bear World, maybe you can share about how you got into this work and the damage you've seen in say, for example, elephants and parrots and chimpanzees.

G: Yes, I would say that my "professional life" or work with animals and animal minds began when I was really at a point -- I'd been working for the government as a research mathematician. And I really came to a point, which is no surprise, where the real problem was not the environment. It was actually people -- humans and understanding them and their psychology, and what really lay behind the destruction and the damage which is being done and has been done. And so I began to go into psychology.

I just I had recently gotten back from Africa -- it was my first trip to Africa -- and that was a lie, it was a National Science Foundation project and I was invited as someone who did modeling and landscape ecology to look at what the effects of this sort of massive translocation/relocation of African lions, what those effects were, because South Africa was just moving from Apartheid and was opening up to ecotourism. So a lot of the reserves, national and provincial parks were importing lions and elephants -- the big five -- to fill their lands that had become depauperate with those species, as attractions for tourists.

And so initially I was there because all these lions were being brought in, and it was kind of a large-scale project where it was saying: "wow, we're looking at lions and lion dynamics at this landscape level -- what's going on?" And at that time -- it was the third day into the trip, this park ranger told me the story of these elephants. And at the time I was even more naïve, I just didn't really understand the significance.

They were finding all these dead rhinos, white rhinoceroses and black rhinoceroses, which were both and are still endangered. And at first, they thought it was poachers. But over a space of time, it was over a decade, over 100 had been killed. And they came across the suspects. The suspects and the perpetrators as such were young male elephants, which was shocking. It was unprecedented, and it was a real puzzle that became a puzzle for me and the subject of my dissertation.

So, I was coming to the elephant situation with a neuropsychological eye, which is different from a behavioral perspective. And what fell out when I looked at the biographies of these young male elephants, was that they had suffered a series of what I came to call trauma -- psychological and physiological traumas. So these young elephants had witnessed in the 80s -- they had a helicopter cull. So they witnessed their mothers being killed, their families being killed in this horrific -- you can imagine being shot from the air when they were infants. And they were prematurely weaned, and they were translocated to these different Parks when they were babies without the normal social structure, etc. I mean it was South Africa, but every place is very different.

So they had to fend on their own. And not only that, they did not have a family structure. And then these young males as they matured did not have an invitation to join an all-male bull group or area.

So in sort of classical terms, elephants have these two main phases of socialization, which are the natal family -- being with mommy and the aunts and siblings -- and then the young males are either kicked out or they leave in their teens and they go off to be with male older male elephants, and are with them for at least 15 years until they become sexually mature which is in their 30s. So these young bulls were the perpetrators. They were coming into musth early, like when they were in their teens, so prematurely. And they were actually assaulting and killing rhinoceroses.

At first, I think they saw the footprints. But I think it was a tourist actually who got this on film.

So anyways, I was not trained in animal behavior, my background was not in biology, but I been exposed to it. So I look through the lens of neuropsychology. And that's when I discovered that science runs on -- and this leads into what you mentioned, trans-species psychology. The biomedical sciences -- and pretty much all of science -- implicitly runs on a unitary model of brain, mind and behavior for all animals. And animal models using rats, cats, you name it, in labs to probe human minds and bodies is the standard. However, making inference from animals to humans was okay, has been okay and it still is. But going from human to animals was not. And when I looked at the work, and given my background, it just didn't make sense.

So I contacted a couple of pooh-bahs in the areas of neuroscience, and I said: "you know, I'm looking at these elephants and I'm seeing these symptoms. Making inference from humans to animals, is that done?" And one famous Stanford professor said: "yes, you're correct, but it's not done." So I was later to learn what was meant by "it's not done." We can get into that later.

So essentially I ended up doing a study on this, talking to different people in India as well, and finding out that there was some similar symptomatology, etc., and that they conform to the classic symptoms and the criteria for post-traumatic stress disorder, and essentially complex post-traumatic stress disorder, which includes relational trauma and a series of trauma, which these individuals had experienced.

So I established, I named this field called trans-species psychology -- not to start a new field, it was mainly to bring attention to the fact of this is the way science is. Science uses, cookie cuts out this bi-directional inference. And so trans-species psychology, as I said, it was not meant to start a new field but to name what the corpus of science really said. And that is that elephant brains, bear brains, human brains, cat brains, and even octopus -- in 2012, neuroscientists in Cambridge came out with this manifesto saying: all animals including invertebrates, such as the octopus, have the same neural substrates. In other words, they've got the same brains and processes that we do, which gives us the capacity for thinking, feeling and consciousness.

L: And that should give us a little humility about our role relative to other species.

G: Yeah. From a personal perspective, why did I end up going to get a second PhD, that was certainly not my intention. However, I wasn't conscious of it, now I can put a name on it. I was really trying to find collective language, in this case science, which would describe my own personal experiences that I've had throughout my life.

L: Well Gay, let's get into Charlie. To me, you might appear as kind of an Odd Couple. I mean, you're such a well-published scholar and a public persona, while Charlie was shy woodsman who didn't finish High School. How did your paths cross? And what kind of connection did you have?

G: I can't quite remember who it was, but someone said to Charlie or someone said to me: "you know, you should talk to each other." I think his book Grizzly Heart came out about the same time that mine, Elephants on the Edge came out. So anyway, somehow we were given each other's phone numbers. And I don't think either were particularly interested in each other, but we followed up on it, and we just started talking. And we had another conversation and another conversation.

And what was Charlie's frustration, of course, and his motivation for spending time talking to me was what I wrote about in terms of animal psychology and trauma, in other words the effects of human violence on animals, which includes bears, grizzly bears, resonated with his own experience. And he had been very frustrated because in our society, generally speaking, your ideas are not validated or not considered to be valid unless you are degreed, unless you have some kind of Masters PhD or some kind of collectively sanctioned authority in that way.

And Charlie was very sensitive person. And he saw year after year, that both the ranching and the "management" and biological agencies were essentially exacerbating the issues with bears, plus his own personal deep disturbing feelings about seeing such violence and misperception being imposed on these wonderful beings. Anyways, he appreciated that well, I've got the degrees. What I said to him was: "well the things that you're observing, that you have experienced with bears, are what the neurosciences and neuropsychology with science would predict." It was consistent. So science would predict exactly what Charlie observed.

What really kept Charlie and me connected was that we both had a commitment to truth, and I would say an allergy to mistruth, particularly where it was so harmful -- in this case we're talking about bears and other wildlife. So we were both really committed to the truth. And that was something that I think really was the glue that kept us together. And I would say it was love, I grew to love Charlie. I don't know if he loved me or not. But I think it was love in the sense of the Bear World love. When he was with bears -- and this is my experience with other animals -- the substrate of existence is really love. So I would say that Charlie and I shared a deep commitment to truth and a deep appreciation for love, which we felt that nature is really made of, or that that is the substrate of nature.

L: Charlie wrote a lot about love in his various books and love of being in connection with bears, but also joy -- the joy of being present with animals --

G: and curiosity. I'll give you another personal comment my experience with Charlie which extended almost 10 years -- conversations twice a week or more. He was just such a loving person. And he was just a loving person. I'm not trying to say to me. I'm just saying he just emanated love and care. And so in that way he very much resonated with what he "studied." He would say "I understand bears, I don't study them." But he resonated and reflected the love of nature.

L: In your book, you describe the love that Charlie had for this particular bear Brandy. Maybe you could read a passage that gets to his connection with her.

G: Okay, this is from the preface.

A female brown bear is standing on a grassy bench looking down at a patchwork of snow and turf. Her nose lips as the wind passes. The air carries the sweetness of blossoms and the quiet growl of a snowmelt river. It is summer in Kamchatka Russia's far eastern peninsula. For seven months the land has rested in frozen slumber. Now, with the season's warmth, life bursts into a raucous cavalcade of colour -- streams choked with crimson salmon, meadows laughing green and stark sky beaming blue. It is bear time, time to glean every calorie possible in preparation for the coming winter. The subject of the bear is a man with tousled gray hair and Welly boots. He is sitting on a pocket of grass nestled between the arms of a snowbank. Two bear cubs are playing near him. Without shifting her gaze, the bear begins to walk slowly toward the man and cubs. There is intention in her pace. Suddenly an explosion of life disrupts the tranquility. The cubs have caught sight of their mother. They run joyously toward her, their faces open with broad, toothy smiles. The adults -- man and bear -- exchange silent greetings in the space above the chaos of rambunctious youth. Cub minding duties finished for the day, the man rises and tucks his camera back into its case. As he leaves, he glances back at the mother and child reunion. The female, who would come to be known as Brandy, is lying on her back with her cubs nursing eagerly. Walking stick in hand, the man heads for home. It's been a grand day.

L: Thank you. Well Charlie spoke a lot about mutual relations with wild animals as defined by respect, humility, attentiveness and what he called "fitting in." Maybe you could explain more about this and how his views might relate to your own.

G: "Fitting in" was a term that Charlie used, and it was really a principle of his philosophy and his ethos. And what it meant is -- and he describes it when he grows up in various situations and when he's in Kamchatka -- in a sense, it's antithetical to the attitude and the philosophy of modern humanity. It's not standing out. It's becoming part of where you are.

So for example, it's the idea of -- and others have raised it this way -- how you come to someone's house. Let's say you're driving in the country and you see a house. And for some reason you want to go talk to that person. Well, depending on which culture you come from, you go down the driveway, and you wait a little bit. In some cultures, people wait in the car until the house owner comes out. Or you go up and you knock on the door. You don't just walk on in and then go to the fridge and take out a sandwich and have a beer and ignore everyone that's around you.

And that really describes how our culture acts in nature and how "management" -- I don't like to use that word, but for lack of a better term -- and wildlife biologists in these capacities, and I would say even conservation research. It's very presumptuous. It presumes human primacy, that our objectives, our needs come well before and are justified before anyone else or any other animal. So that's a kind of a rough description.

But when you read through the book and you listen to Charlie's details, "fitting in" is also metaphysical. It's a very different mode of being, it's not necessarily having an agenda. It's a listening mode. It's a watching mode. It's becoming part of the landscape. And I think that we sense that when we have that

yearning to go to nature. Well, if someone is unhappy, or they've had trauma, or they just want to relax in general, most people go to nature. Or they play the ocean on their internet or something like that. Nature is very soothing and healing, and that is really because everyone fits in. So there's a fundamental coherence.

And so for Charlie, fitting in was learning how -- and it takes some time, it takes listening. Like when he was Kamchatka he had to learn how to fit into that particular combination of Kambalnoye basin. It's all very specific, and he had to learn how to fit in specifically there. And he made a real effort to do that, in the way he designed and put his cabin, the way he walked, when he did things, when he didn't do things, etc.

L: Charlie certainly did some unconventional things with grizzlies. Some were very practical, in terms of when he was on his ranch in Alberta, he fed in the spring dead cows to grizzlies to keep them from eating his calves. And they left his livestock alone, the bears did. But other things that Charlie did were seen as radical, especially the forging of these intimate relationships with grizzlies at such close distances that many managers and even other scientists freaked out. And I assume that you and Charlie had a lot to say to each other on this topic of connection, the profound deep connection to wild animals.

G: When you are talking about the cows, that's a very logical thing. Charlie spent a lot of time understanding, learning about grizzly ways and culture. And all the bison were gone. They were driven out by the farmers and the ranchers. And any biologist would look at it and say: "oh, you've changed their habitat." They don't have the resources that they need, that they have evolved to have. So from Charlie's point of view, leaving dead cows was a way of bridging what the way things were and the way things are, so that bears were able to carry out their lives and make a living the way they were evolved to. So he was very logical about things. And that logic came from very careful observation from the perspective of this "fitting in" philosophy.

In terms of intimacy, again, it was the same type of thing. Charlie would often say "not all bears like me, and I don't necessarily like all bears." It wasn't that he disliked any bears. It's just like with humans -- some people you click with, some people you don't click with, etcetera. But he listened. So he didn't go up and shake a bear's hand and say "oh, I want to see you. You look like a beautiful bear, and I want to get to know you." Again, it was fitting in, it was very very respectful. He paid attention when he was walking or in Kamchatka. Who was this bear? As much as he could discern -- he was very skilled, and he got to know things very well. Where was that bear at? What was he doing or what was she doing? Was he on his way to fish, did he look like he just come from having a tussle with another bear? What kind of mood is he in, and where is he at?

The entree to intimacy wasn't Charlie's point. I mean it was his point to show people that yes, you can have intimate relationships with these giant awesome bears who could kill you with one swipe, and that they're very gentle and that they're very parsimonious.

Not that he did that on purpose, in the sense of he wanted to disprove these myths that have been promulgated by the agencies that are now part of our cultural myth. So he did want to do that, but on a personal level that wasn't his agenda. He wanted to get to know his neighbors. I mean, that's the same for me. We have black bears around here, we have cougars, deer on all sorts of different wildlife, unfortunately diminishing, with very low tolerance from people. We live as neighbors, and that's what I try to cultivate on the land here, that we are guests.

My parents bought this cabin 70 some years ago, this little log cabin. And they always taught me, indirectly, that we were guests, not only for the wildlife but also for people who had lived in the area before. So I always grew up with the fact of "this is my home." I've spent most of my life here. But I also

feel like I don't own it, that I am a guest here still. We share this together, and we learn each other's ways. That brings a very different kind of an atmosphere and that makes a shift in terms of the animals you encounter. It makes so much sense.

And I have to interject this here -- this is contrary to what Charlie called fear-determined behavior, which is versus fear-informed ways of being. Fear-determined is this notion of scaring off a bear, scaring off a cougar, shooting them, translocating them, acting up tight, making noise. He said that's the first thing a bear's going to say: "Whoa, what the hell is that? I don't see anything going on. Why is that guy scared? Why is he fearful?"

So it does this kind of escalation. People have talked about a "fear landscape" or "landscape of fear," not in this way I'm talking about. But it creates this fearfulness, and that fearfulness has been bred into our culture. Someone made a comment about how the people that came to North America had gone through so much trauma -- they had gone through all the plagues, they were serfs, they were fighting with each other, killing each other. And they came here and wiped out all the wolves, and they wiped out all the bears, and they continued here this fearful mentality. So that is a big part. Charlie was not fearful. He said: "I'm fear-informed, fear is useful. I mean, it gives you information." But not to be defined by fear.

L: And it's not just a cultural fear, it's an institutionalized fear in the management agencies governing the lives of these grizzlies. And it's a politicized fear because you have all the hype around grizzly bears as the "monsters of god" and the wide-open jawed bears on covers of Outdoor Life. So it's fear all around - - and in the end I think we lose track of how much fear is in the management agencies combined with an arrogance and a disrespect of their topic.

G: And also having adverse relationships with wildlife is lucrative. Fishing and hunting and all of that feeds the coffers of the agencies and private enterprise.

L: So in some regards it's no wonder that Charlie's work with grizzlies got to be pretty controversial. But it did surprise me, because he was always so funny and so well informed and so low-key. I thought you did a great job describing this aspect of Charlie in your preface and perhaps you can share that.

G: Yeah, when I describe him here. Let me see if I can read a couple paragraphs.

What Charlie accomplished takes rare courage. Not the kind that held his feet planted in a field of goldenrods as a 600-pound brown bear bore down on him, one day in Kamchatka. That was confidence, the kind that began in the heart and grew with intelligence from years of patient learning and caring. Charlie's real courage lay elsewhere.

What sets him apart and is truly remarkable is the fortitude with which he weathered social dismissal and outrage for refusing to play humanity's game in favor of revealing nature's reality. His unyielding loyalty to nature and truth was regarded as an unforgivable betrayal. Although the exigencies were often painful and, at times, even life threatening, he never wavered. He never forsook his allegiance to nature despite incessant demands and hardship.

The contradictions and controversy surrounding Charlie do not derive from the man, or the bears, but rather from a human reluctance to do what he did -- drop all protective guards of human privilege and walk unarmed in the terrain of the soul, in the space of stillness from which all life springs.

L: Thank you. Well Charlie's difficulties in some ways got worse, or reached a different height when he went to Kamchatka. But he did some remarkable things there. He successfully raised several sets of orphaned grizzly bear cubs, serving as their surrogate mom. Maybe you can share some of what he learned, and how perhaps that changed your understanding of what is possible with wild animals.

G: Well, I think just what I read there is the entrée. It was a surprise -- it was not part of plan A to rescue and reintroduce these orphan brown bears. He was asked by the zoo, I believe it was directly, if he would take these three brown bear cubs. They were orphaned -- their mother had been shot and they were sent to the zoo. And they were starting to become bears, they were no longer cute, and children would stick their fingers in and the situation was more "dangerous." So they would be killed if Charlie didn't take them.

And I think he saw that as an opportunity. Part of his genius was that he always was very open to new ideas and new ways of going about things, So he took the bears and he had to start all over.

You know, he had seen bears and gotten to know bears, but as a human getting to know bears. And as some of the chapters describe, you can't be a human teaching a bear how to do bear things. He underscored that fact. He said: "I thought I'd be the hero, I would teach these bears, and I'm saving them." And he said actually they knew a hell of a lot already. But again I come from neuro-psychologist perspective looking at the development of the brain and the mind and the soul.

In order for the bears to really make it as wild bears and to be accepted into while bear society, they had to learn how to think and feel and all the nuances of wild bear culture in that specific place, which was Kambalnoye basin. So Charlie himself had to sort of do an internal stripping of any ideas or any kind of what I call "shards" of human projections or ideas, to be open to hearing and listening and seeing and understanding the world from a bear's point of view.

So in some ways although on the outside, he was human, on the inside in this capacity he was really bear like. And that is coming from attachment theory which is from psychology. It says our brains and our minds are shaped by our primary caregivers. For elephants, it's a constellation, and more traditional families when you have more than just a mother and a father and kids, when you had grandparents and aunts. But in the bear society, Charlie was the mother bear, and she's the primary person. Of course, there are the siblings and the environment. So he really had to communicate and be in ways that would inform their brains and minds to be like a bear.

I've been thinking about it lately -- that Brandy actually took him in was extraordinary. I think she saw this extraordinary person and I think she was an amazing person, very astute, very deep. And she saw something in Charlie and really respected and cared and loved him for that. And she kind of took him under his wing. And he said he was press-ganged one day. She just left her cubs with him. The cubs were crying and everything like that, and Charlie intuitively fell on his back and played around just like a mother bear would. This mother bear who's supposed to be the most dangerous creature on the planet -- a mother bear with cubs -- just left her cubs with Charlie.

I go into that and kind of analyze it. I mean, he couldn't be just any Giber. Because even if he's a nice guy, he has to be smart enough to know how to navigate the terrain when she's gone. It could be dangerous. So there was so much that she really saw deeply in Charlie, and she mentored him. And he talks about this very humorously, he kind of gets goofy with the cubs and she would make it clear: "you know this is business. I'm fishing, don't mess with me." So that gives you an idea.

I think it's a very important example to reflect on the depth to which we as humans can melt back into nature. And as Charlie always underscored, he was always amazed that despite the horrible things that

people have done to bears over and over and over, even in Kamchatka -- the violence and the terrorism that humans subject bears to -- they still are very open and loving and caring and curious about humans. That being said, getting back to the original about trauma, bears are showing just like other wildlife, they're showing signs of trauma. In other words, they can only take so much.

Trauma transmits across generations, neurobiologically and socially. And most bears -- you can correct me since you guys are the bearologists -- but most bears, black or brown, have either been shot at or they have witnessed their mother shot, they've been exposed not once many times. So a lot of times when a bear is killed, and they do the skinning or autopsy or whatever they're doing, they find multiple bullets in the bear that were not lethal. These were prior incidents.

So in the shift to understanding bears of who they are, as humans we have to give them extra time and buffer to start to calibrate to who these new humans are who aren't going to be violent to them. It's just like when we have people who've suffered severe trauma, whether they're veterans or some other kind of violent trauma, it etches in deeply and it puts you on guard. There's a good reason that bears should be fearful.

So what Charlie showed is this is totally possible, is totally within our grasp. But again, the caveat is while we transition, our attitude, learning -- we have to make sure that the bears are given wide enough berth that they start to decompress from the trauma that they've been subjected to.

L: Yes, giving bears a wide enough berth is becoming much more important as a result of climate change. Over the last 20 years or so, in Yellowstone and Glacier, climate change has been forcing grizzlies to forage much more widely as a result of the loss of key foods in the core of the ecosystems, foods like whitebark pine seeds. So climate change underscores the need for even higher degree of human tolerance and compassion, as grizzlies seek to compensate for the loss of some native foods.

G: Yes, yes. What we're talking about, and right now is a perfect time, we can see the changes in animals with the quarantining all over the world is reports of essentially animals coming back out, feeling confidence again, they're no longer feeling so beleaguered. And we should pay attention to that and understand about how much stress that animals are having to sustain, just because we want to do what we want to do.

The other thing that Charlie talked about, and I believe as well, is that when you go out into nature again, it's like going into someone's home. You be respectful. And not have the objective and the entitlement of "I do want to see a bear. I want to see a bison." It's not a human right. And so, you know again, this is human entitlement and human primacy. And the nature and animals are more important or more important than -- their numbers of course are diminishing. But I also believe that when we make those changes internally, when we subordinate our ego, when we start to listen, we see that we're not that important. What is important is a philosophy of getting along and respecting, and as much as we can each of us go without and not be demanding, that has a positive effect on us as humans and our relationships with each other. So, the violence that we see is because we're sort of untethered, because we're not fitting in. And that's a big lesson.

L: Yeah, it's such a disturbing ethos. It's not just: "I want a picture of a bear." It's like nature is a trophy, even if you may not be gunning them down or putting their head on the wall. Even people coming to the park see nature as trophy, things on the checklist, which is a form of sort of arrogance and dominance even if people aren't killing them.

G: Yes.

L: Gay, you exposed Charlie to the work of the physicist David Bohm who was a colleague of Albert Einstein and whose ideas about quantum physics inspired both of you. Maybe you can share how that work is relevant to caring for this planet and the animals.

G: Well, this tells you a little bit about Charlie. We worked together for a long time, and we're writing different versions, and I explained about how that we had accomplished half of what we wanted. We explained that all these myths about grizzly bears being maniacs being unpredictable were false, and we showed that with the science.

But that was only half of what we wanted, because the other half was really how does Charlie see what he sees? And how does he do what he does and why? So essentially, we were looking for a way to articulate in collective terms Charlie's theory of nature. And I had studied in the past physics, that was my background, physics and mathematics largely, and quantum physics. I'm not a quantum physicist, I know it superficially, but I have a couple of colleagues who are theoretical physicists, quantum physicists. And so I showed this video interview of David Bohm who was a quantum physicist, he was the heir apparent of Albert Einstein, to Charlie and he called me immediately said: "oh my God, I feel like I've found my lost brother." He was like a soul mate in terms of hearing the way David Bohm described life in the world – it was very much the same way that Charlie experienced it.

So when you look at quantum physics, quantum physics is organic to the Western science paradigm, what we would call the colonial paradigm. But it basically has changed it all -- it was a paradigm buster. Everything that we look at which is based on classical mechanics, then reductionism and dualism, etcetera. Quantum mechanics said no, that's not the way the world works. That's not the way things are. There's this notion of oneness, etcetera. Now quantum mechanics -- really that happened over a hundred years ago and it continues to be developed, quantum mechanics has been stuffed into the same political, economic, social agenda. So it's been reduced into reductionism to make faster computers and safer money and things like that.

David Bohm was very unusual in the sense that he took the message, the philosophical, the profound existential message to the streets. And that message really resonated with Charlie.

And even in the sense of the way that they had personal experiences were very similar. So that was also very important that Charlie was not just a "bear guy" in the sense this is also about the bears, bears are not just bears. It has to do with really understanding these beings, Charlie and the bears and other wildlife as having particular metaphysical and philosophical views which are resonant with quantum physics.

L: Well Gay, how does your long work with Charlie informed you're evolving views about animal sentience and animal welfare?

G: Well, I would say writing the book -- I wrote the book de novo after Charlie passed. And it was a real crucible for me because I felt this incredible -- I mean we got to the point where I'd send things back and forth, and he would say: "did I say that or did you write that?" So I had full confidence, and close family and friends agreed that that I was worthy and had the ability to be able to convey Charlie faithfully. That was very very important for me, ethically as well as the bears. But it was a crucible for me. I mean many people felt his loss was huge.

I had to do a lot of what I call internal work. I would even look up words that I would just normally use just to make sure that I was using them in the context that was really true. And so having that precision

and accuracy was very important. And I had to do internal work to make sure I was like kind of a clear channel, although we were very much overlapping in our philosophies and ideas, nonetheless this was really a vehicle for hearing Charlie and the bears' philosophy and science. That's what it was. Back to your question, that was kind of a preface to it, is that's still working me in depth. I'm teaching a class on the book because there's a lot to reflect on. There's a lot of deeper things and underneath many layers in Charlie's teachings and his reflections.

And it's made me even more committed to the truth. I guess that's what it is. It just sort of burned out any kind of -- I don't know what you want to call it -- any kind of social pressure or social leanings to kind of soften the message. It's really cleaned me down to the bare truth and how to communicate that in the most effective way for the animals. So it has made me just -- what I wrote when I read that first passage, commit not to deviate from the fidelity with nature the way Charlie never deviated from his fidelity with nature.

And I bring that into my work with -- we have a sanctuary and the wildlife that we try to support here under these very difficult times. That changes you when you no longer are having a split allegiance between the human agenda, the dominant human agenda and those of the animals, it changes you. And that's basically what I've done is that shedding. And that requires -- we have a little tagline "be who animals need us to be" -- and that is they need us to be honest, and they need us to clean up our own internal act, our projections, our ego, all that kind of stuff. Because they're very honest, and they're very real, and they're very true.

And so that's had an effect on me to be -- we have many animals right now that just because of their ages and the abuses they suffered are catching up. And so a large part of my work is hospice work. And that means really being present where they're at. And so I guess that's kind of a long-winded way to say that's kind of one of the effects of this work has had on me and my personal life.

L: Thank you for your work. I should want throw one thing parenthetically in here, given listeners who go to bear country. Charlie was really all about safety in bear country. He got really close to bears, he understood bears. He was very safe. He never carried a gun. He carried bear spray, but he only had used it a few times to protect his cubs from other male bears that he feared would kill him.

Charlie was really all about safety and discernment in bear country. He had electric fence around his cabin. He could do things because he was so in tune with bears and bear behavior and what they needed. And you know, he was part bear. But not to understate that he was not silly out there either.

Gay, I've got one last question about your take on the future. You know, we obviously have been talking about a planet in peril and wildlife that have never been so imperiled by humankind, through pollution and development and intolerance and killing and climate change. What do you think it's going to take to turn things around if we still can?

G: I think it takes internal transformation in a commitment the way Charlie did. And it means putting nature first before ourselves. I mean, obviously we have to live. But that having that fidelity to nature and just learning to put our own ego down and our needs that might even be financial and might be social -- when you talk to people in the animal rights movement or vegan or whatever, they talk about the social tensions. To break the human-human contract that's where tensions are, because that is maintaining a certain cultural contract that's gone. That was never there. That's the artificial world that was created.

Our job right now is learning how to live nature reality the way Charlie did. Charlie was very practical. And as you said in terms of this parenthetical, he wasn't dumb. I mean he spent years learning to live with nature and fitting in. So as we talked about the trauma that animals have suffered, that cougar have suffered, that bears -- they don't have food. They have people all over, making noise. There's roads, that's incredibly disruptive. We have to understand that they have souls and minds and they are traumatized.

And we have to learn to go quietly, and we have to learn to recede. Give back nature, we're not managing them, we need to manage ourselves and we need to refrain and restrain. We have a perfect opportunity right now to make a radical change in our culture, and that radical change is to devote ourselves to nature's wellness and putting ourselves second to nature.

L: Well, thank you Gay. Thank you so much for joining us today. This is Louisa Wilcox with Dr. Gay Bradshaw at Grizzly Times. Thank you so much.

G: Well, thank you.