

## The Dragonfly Incident by Bill Sherwonit

I suppose this could be considered a “wildlife encounter” story of sorts, though it presents some unusual twists. For one thing, the animal at the heart of this tale is a subarctic insect (and yet has nothing to do with the region’s legendary mosquitoes). For another, odd things happen that aren’t easily explained by either reason or chance. There are other curious turns, as well ...

The story begins with a man sitting on the front steps of a lakeside cabin, feeling contented and thankful to be part of such a beautiful, softly shimmering summer day. He’d brought a mug of coffee out to the porch, plus binoculars and a journal in which he planned to record some dreams. In between sips of his morning coffee, he noticed splashing on the otherwise calm lake surface, not far offshore. Actually it wasn’t so much a splashing as a trembling, those shudders creating tiny ripples that spread outward a short distance, until disappearing into the stillness of the water.

The source of the ripples barely moved, which suggested that a small creature of some kind was struggling. Picking up his nearby binoculars to take a closer look, the man saw a dragonfly, rapidly—and, it seemed, desperately—flapping its wings, or trying to.

The splashing stopped, then started again a few moments later. It went on like this for a couple of minutes, the tremble of wings on water gradually diminishing, as if the insect were losing its strength, its vitality, which of course it must have been.

The man wondered how the dragonfly ended up on the water. Had it somehow miscalculated while pursuing another insect, and crashed into the lake? That seemed unlikely, given dragonflies’ legendary flying abilities. But accidents happen, right?

Or maybe it had been chased by a bird and driven into the water. Or, its wings weakened and worn by age, perhaps the dragonfly had simply, finally, lost the power of flight.

In the midst of all those thoughts, another entered the man’s mind: why not try to rescue the dragonfly? For as long as he could recall, he’d been fascinated by dragonflies and their smaller, more delicate cousins, the damselflies. It might not be too great a stretch to say that occasionally he’d felt a sort of connection to them, the way some people feel linked to a particular animal, or plant, or landscape. He’d felt similar bonds to other wild creatures. The connection, if that’s what it was, had always been fleeting. But it seemed real, even if it wasn’t something he felt comfortable talking about, except with close, trusted friends. Even then, he sometimes felt a little silly and self-conscious, as if others

would consider him odd for having such experiences. In truth he did sometimes feel odd. But also blessed.

Besides that, in recent years the man had stretched his sense of ethics and “right behavior” to include his relationship with insects. That was still a work in progress, though he’d even experimented with seeing how far he could go into summer without killing a mosquito.

But back to the dragonfly. The man went into the cabin and grabbed a broom, then walked down to the lakeshore. Alas, the dragonfly was too far out to reach, even with the broom. Oh well, the man sighed to himself. I tried.

Yet as he stood there watching the dragonfly, the insect beat its wings furiously for several seconds, then stopped, as if resting. Or exhausted. For a while after, the wings continued to shiver ever so slightly, sending out miniscule ripples. Then even they stopped.

More thoughts came to the man. Just how far am I willing to go, to save this dragonfly? How determined, how committed am I? The dragonfly appeared close enough to reach, if he waded out a ways. Okay, he decided. I can do that.

The man took off his hiking boots and socks and rolled up his pants, then gingerly stepped into the water, cold but not painfully so. (He wasn’t one to splash around in lakes or streams or oceans, even in warmer temperatures.) With the water nearly to his knees, he stretched his right arm and lifted the dragonfly out of the water on the broom’s bristled end. Smiling, he waded back to shore, the dragonfly weakly fluttering its wings.

Back on land, the man gently pried the dragonfly from the broom, careful not to harm the insect, whose dark, barbed legs kept a firm grip on the bristles.

His next decision: where to put the dragonfly? After considering various options, he chose to place it upon a picnic table, which offered a dry, spacious, sunlit surface. The dragonfly again fluttered its wings, as if trying to fly, but didn’t budge. It might be too waterlogged to survive its dunking, the man thought. But I’ve done what I can.

He returned to the porch steps, took a sip of coffee, and then picked up his journal. But instead of writing about his dream the night before, he jotted some notes about his interaction with the dragonfly.

Have I mentioned the man had a dog? Probably not, because the dog, though curious that his companion was behaving in such an unusual way, didn’t show much interest in the dragonfly. But the dog was another reason the man chose the tabletop, to keep the dragonfly away from her easy reach. Now settled back on the steps, he called the dog to him and they sat side by side a while, until some sound in the bushes pulled the dog away.

Now and then, the man would look up from his journal toward the picnic table. The first couple of times he did so, the dragonfly remained in place, still drying in the sun. But the third time he checked, the dragonfly had disappeared. This surprised him. He hadn’t really expected it to recover. Could it have somehow flopped off the table? Walking over, he thoroughly checked the ground but couldn’t find the insect. He supposed a bird could have swooped in and snatched the dragonfly off the table, but that seemed unlikely.

With no certain evidence, the man decided the dragonfly had mended enough to fly away. This possibility pleased him. Returning to the porch, he sensed himself grinning. Back on the steps, the man took another sip of coffee and then opened his journal, added a few more observations. When he got back to Anchorage, he'd dig out his *Dragonflies of Alaska* guide and try to determine which species he'd pulled from the lake.

Several minutes later, while looking up from his journal, he noticed a dragonfly land on the large, exposed root of a nearby birch tree, no more than eight feet from where he sat.

Here is where the story takes something of a surreal twist. While he watched, the dragonfly left the tree, circled a couple of times, and then zigzagged toward the man. And it landed softly on the back of his right hand.

Until that very moment, the man had never considered the possibility that such a thing might happen. Though startled, he didn't flinch, but rather sat perfectly still, as if a spell had been cast upon him.

For a few moments (he later recalled), his brain seemed empty of thoughts, his entire being attentive to the strange yet marvelous creature that was grasping his hand. With something close to fondness, he took in the dragonfly's bulbous head and enormous gleaming eyes; the fantastically intricate wings with their complex veining, those wings too glistening in the sunlight; and the blue-and-brown banded, tail-like abdomen. Yet more than any bodily detail he, what captivated him most was the dragonfly's calm yet vibrant presence on his skin and a sense of shared awareness.

If the man had been caught in some sort of spell, the magic didn't last long, soon replaced by curiosity and desire. The man wondered how the dragonfly would respond if he lifted it closer to his face. Would it stay on his hand? Or surprise him in some other way?

Well, it flew away. And didn't return.

Only then did the man's mind explode in a silent Wow! And once again his brain became busy with thoughts and questions. So many questions. For starters, what about the dragonfly's struggle had aroused his desire to help it? What if he'd been unable to reach the dragonfly even after wading into the lake up to his knees; would he have given up or kept trying? And why did trying seem so important? And what in the world had prompted a dragonfly to land on him the very morning he'd rescued one? In some inexplicable way, could the insect that he'd saved been drawn back to him?

Behind all these questions were two others. Was he being ridiculous for taking this "dragonfly incident" (as he'd begun to think of it) too seriously? Or, conversely, was it possible that his preconceptions of dragonflies—and "lower" forms of life, generally—had blocked him from some deeper, more meaningful experience?

He just didn't know what to make of this, this . . . what? Encounter? Meeting? Connection? But he was pretty darn certain that in all his 66 years, a dragonfly had never before landed on his hand—or any other part of his body, that he could recall—though he'd spent plenty of time in their company at swamps and lakes and other bodies of water.

Ah, you think too much, he muttered to himself, brow wrinkled and lips set tightly in a wry sort of smile. Seated on that sun-drenched porch, the journal still open on his lap, he gazed back toward the still water. Maybe that was part of the problem: he spent too much

time rolling thoughts around his head, not enough time listening to his gut. Or simply experiencing the present moment without analyzing it. Simply being.

While his rational side argued that what happened was nothing more than a pretty amazing coincidence, some deeper, intuitive part of him wasn't convinced of that. He sensed that he stood at a gateway into some different realm, a deeper way of connecting with wild nature, the more-than-human world that he loved so much. It wasn't the first time he'd felt this way. Sometimes he wished he could be more open to the possibilities . . .

There you go again, he playfully chided himself. Too much musing.

If nothing else, he needed to learn more about the nature of dragonflies and what other, more mystical folks have to say about their symbolism, their significance.

The man's stay at the cabin ended the next day. He continued to think about the dragonfly incident off and on, especially whenever he spotted one hovering along the lake. Could that be the one? he wondered. None of the dragonflies took special note of him, that he could tell. But at the time he didn't know what a wide field of vision they possess.

The funny thing was, it didn't end there.

The day after he returned to Anchorage, the man went hiking in the mountains. Arriving back home, he noticed another injured dragonfly, lying on his lawn with its wings quivering weakly. The dragonfly looked identical to the one he'd rescued at the lake. For an instant, he wondered if it might even be the same dragonfly, but he quickly dismissed that notion, because it would have had to fly close to 100 miles, without knowing where to go.

The man reached down, held out his hand, and the dragonfly latched onto one of his fingers. Its wings fluttered more vigorously when he lifted the insect, but it was clear the dragonfly was too weak or injured to fly. Its body seemed intact, no missing or broken parts. On closer inspection, the back edges of both rear wings were slightly frayed, but would that be enough to keep it from flying?

More questions surfaced. Had the dragonfly been attacked or perhaps smacked into his kitchen window and suffered internal injuries he couldn't see? Could it have simply grown old? It didn't look worn out. What's the lifespan of a dragonfly, anyway? Again he realized how little he knew about the animal.

The man tried to place the dragonfly off the ground, but it kept fluttering and flailing off its perch. Finally he put it back on the grass, near the house, and wished it well. And he didn't think much more about it until the next morning. The dragonfly was right where he'd left it. At first it appeared still and he guessed it to be dead. But when he got close, he saw that the creature's wings were faintly trembling. And when he picked it up, he felt the legs move, ever so slightly.

Figuring the dragonfly didn't have long to live, the man brought it inside his house and took it to his bedroom, where he placed the insect upon a chest of drawers. As far back as he could remember, he'd felt a deep, ineffable sadness upon learning, or even imagining, that a person or animal had died alone, the death unnoticed. It wasn't that he planned to keep a vigil until the dragonfly died, but he was at least attending to it in the creature's

last hours. That counted for something.

Somehow it seemed appropriate to say something to, or for, the ebbing life on his dresser, so he spoke a few comforting words, though a part of him couldn't help but wonder if it was for his own comfort too.

He left the dragonfly then. And when he returned a couple of hours later, he discovered it had fallen off the chest and slipped between the dresser and the wall, but was somehow clinging to its side. Moving the dresser he retrieved the dragonfly, wings now motionless and legs moving feebly.

The man decided to return it outside, where the insect more naturally belonged, and he placed it atop a flower box on the front deck and left for a walk with his dog. When he returned some hours later, the dragonfly remained exactly where he'd put it. A light rain had begun, so he again moved it inside and placed it on the chest. There it remained, barely moving at first and by evening not moving at all, the body now a shell, empty of the life force—the spirit?—that had once animated the creature.

Still the man was drawn to the dragonfly, fascinated by the mystery of both its life and death and the splendor of its body, especially the remarkably long and narrow abdomen, the fierce face dominated by those bulging eyes, and the beautifully patterned wings that give the insect such remarkable flying abilities, such a magnificent blend of beauty and utility. How long would that body last, without anything special done to preserve it?

Again he realized what rudimentary knowledge he had of dragonflies (and other insects). The man wanted to know more. He would learn more.

He couldn't help but wonder again about the two close encounters, only a couple of days apart. He sensed he'd been drawn to them as messengers of some kind, but nagging doubts remained. Was his experience simply the product of an over-active imagination? Or a wish for some deeper connection with other beings with whom he shared the world?

He could only shake his head and sigh. If nothing else, the dragonflies had enlivened his life, raised questions, opened new possibilities.

Days, weeks, months passed. The man didn't do the research he'd vowed to do, but almost every day he noticed the dragonfly's body. Now and then he'd pick it up, hold it gently in an admiring way, wonder some more. The body seemed to grow progressively lighter (though it barely weighed anything even in life) and more fragile and he considered whether it would eventually disintegrate. It did finally break into pieces one winter day, after somehow getting knocked off the dresser's top.

After collecting all the parts that he could find, the man held them in his hand, feeling badly that he hadn't taken better care of the insect's body. Though his initial impulse was to throw away the pieces, he decided instead to put them in a small box, a sort of remembrance of the dragonflies and the way they'd touched him, and he placed it on a shelf.

He didn't think much more about the dragonflies for several weeks. Then, while searching for a card to send a relative whose mother had died, he found one with a beautiful drawing, a dragonfly prominent in the natural scene. He decided to keep that card, choosing another to send his bereaved relative. Not long after, a friend described her own close encounter with a dragonfly that had landed on her newly asphalted driveway one

summer. Remarkably, the woman and her husband helped the insect to clean tarry gunk from its eyes and body. After being misted and left to dry, the dragonfly flew away.

A hazy childhood memory that the man hadn't recalled in a long time also returned to him: one summer day while he walked through his Connecticut yard, a dragonfly buzzed right up to the boy. Startled, he waved his hands at the insect, which zoomed away, only to be snatched by a robin, an outcome that both surprised the boy and saddened him a bit. He felt badly that his "go away" actions led to the dragonfly's death. Even then, he felt there was something special about the insect.

All of this inspired the man to finally do the research he'd put off for too long. He pulled several books from his shelves and went online and began reading. He started with two local guidebooks, *Insects of South-central Alaska* and *Dragonflies of Alaska*. The latter especially proved helpful. From it he learned that more than thirty species of dragonflies inhabit Alaska (including "true" dragonflies and their smaller, more delicate relatives, damselflies, which fold their wings or keep them partly open while resting and are considered weak flyers). Those represent only a miniscule fraction of the 7,000 or so species found worldwide, all belonging to the insect order Odonata, apparently meaning "toothed ones." He already knew the biodiversity of plants and animals to be low in Alaska when compared to more temperate locales, never mind the tropics, so that didn't really surprise him. More impressive, perhaps, was that nearly three dozen types of dragonflies reside in so northerly a place.

To be honest, he'd never paid much attention to the different varieties. He wondered if that would change, given his newfound fascination with dragonflies. Or would this be a passing fancy?

He recalled how black-capped chickadees had unexpectedly gained his middle-aged attention nearly a quarter-century earlier, and how they and other local birds—most of them common species that he'd never before noticed—had opened up the man's world in unimaginable ways and continued to enrich his life to this very day. And what about the wood frogs? For a long time he had no idea they inhabited the Anchorage landscape. Now they were among his favorite wild neighbors and he eagerly anticipated their reemergence every spring. The more he learned about wood frogs, the more miraculous their northern lives seemed. Given all that, and his still-growing curiosity about other life forms, well yeah, it seemed likely dragonflies would have a greater presence in his life.

Besides the basic information it provided about their lives, *Dragonflies of Alaska* presented some dazzling images of the state's various species (all of the individuals "posed" in resting positions after being caught and cooled). Perhaps best of all, the guidebook helped the man identify the dragonfly he'd rescued. Almost surely it was *Aeshna eremita*, the lake darner, largest member of the "blue darner" family, reaching more than three inches long. The biggest dragonflies to inhabit Alaska, blue darners are distinguished by the blue patterns on their long, slender, tail-like abdomens, twin stripes on the thorax (sometimes but not always blue), and strong flying abilities.

Numbering seven species, members of Alaska's blue darner family may remain in their larval form for up to five years before transforming to adults, while the adults live only eight to ten weeks. So that lake darner the man found on his lawn in early September might simply have died from what we humans call "natural causes" tied to old age. While in their prime, blue darners are known for venturing far from water and may be encountered just about anywhere, including parking lots and roadways. When Alaskans smack into a dragonfly while driving, chances are good it's a blue darner.

They also display fierce predatory behavior, which begins while they're still larvae. Up to 1½ inches long, the larval forms may capture not only other insects, but also tadpoles and even small fish, helped by a hinged and serrated lower lip (called a labium) that folds under the head until some unsuspecting prey comes within striking distance. Then they shoot out the labium at "lightning speed" and grasp their victim in a toothy death grip. As if that weren't frightening enough, the larvae can surge through the water using a form of jet propulsion, accomplished by squirting water out of the back of their abdomen. It sounded to the man like a pollywog's worst nightmare.

Dragonfly adults are every bit as ferocious and even more skilled at capturing prey, as the man learned from a fascinating New York Times article he discovered online. Research has shown them to be arguably the world's most capable hunters, snatching their prey out of the air more than nine out of every ten times they try. That helps feed their enormous appetites. By one scientist's count, a dragonfly monitored in a lab once caught and ate 30 flies without stopping for a break. It only ended feasting when no more flies remained.

Researchers have linked dragonflies' unmatched hunting proficiency to their extraordinary eyes and wings, along with an aptitude for "selective attention," the ability to focus on a single target amidst a swirling crowd of insects. That's a talent we humans don't ordinarily attribute to what we consider more "primitive" forms of life.

The more the man read, the more amazing it all seemed: the scientific research that enabled such discoveries, Natalie Angier's wonderfully engaging reportage of that research, and especially the dragonflies themselves. Another example: scientists who study dragonflies say their eyes are the largest and likely the sharpest of any insect, in Angier's words, "a pair of giant spheres each built of some 30,000 pixel-like facets" that dominate the head. One of the many scientists she interviewed explained that those immense eyes give dragonflies "a full field of vision. They can see you when they're flying toward you and still see you when they're flying away."

So, the man reflected, standing in the company of hovering dragonflies, I might be watched even when they seem to be looking elsewhere. How cool is that?

And those four lovely, transparent wings? Besides being "ultraflexible," each is attached to the thorax by separate muscles and thus can be operated independently, which enables their legendary ability to, in Angier's words, "hover, dive, fly backward and upside down, pivot 360 degrees with three tiny wing beats, and reach speeds of 30 miles per hour, lightning for an arthropod."

Other research had found a "neuronal package" connecting the brain to a "flight motor center" in the thorax. Among other things, that connection apparently allows dragonflies to track their targeted prey, calculate the best path to intercept it, and adjust that path if needed. All of this is part of their selective attention, generally attributed to "high order thinking." As one researcher put it, "Here we have a simple brain of less than a million neurons behaving like our own brain of 100 billion neurons."

Well, that's humbling, the man thought. What amazing creatures.

Though impressed by what scientists had learned about dragonflies, the man also felt unsettled by all their probing and manipulation of the animals' brains, eyes, wings, and other body parts. It struck him as cruel that people harm other living beings—including

insects—simply for the sake of “advancing” scientific knowledge. It also seemed clear that such behavior reflected a widespread cultural bias, still deeply ingrained in modern (but not necessarily enlightened) western societies, that humans stand apart from—and above—the rest of nature. We somehow have the right, and certainly the ability, to manage, manipulate, and if necessary, exterminate other life forms if it serves our purpose. For all their differences, both mainstream religion and science largely seem to uphold such views.

Once more the man sighed. This was complicated stuff, not easily explained or even understood. He knew his own perceptions, beliefs and values were still evolving, and had been for many years. He’d begun writing down his thoughts about this and someday, he hoped, he would arrive at a clearer vision.

In his boyhood, the man reminded himself, he’d caught, poked, and sometimes dismembered insects and other small creatures. He later regretted his tormenting actions and eventually largely forgave himself for that behavior and other childhood meanness. Some remnant guilt might have contributed to his efforts, now and then, to “help” tiny creatures, a small way of making amends for the harm he’d once done. (Despite his good intentions, his rescue attempts sometimes went badly. Like so many people, he couldn’t help meddling in things. That too seemed to be a part of human nature, scientific or otherwise.)

As an adult he’d come to believe that doing unnecessary harm to other living beings was wrong and in middle age had even given up catch-and-release “sport” fishing, which he once had loved. He knew he honored this newer code of behavior imperfectly, but did his best to be mindful of his actions toward all forms of life.

In Alaska, where killing animals remains for some people an integral part of subsistence lifestyles, and for many others a recreational passion, the man knew he stood far out of the mainstream. Even his sense of what is sentient was shifting, expanding. He found himself increasingly drawn to the idea, the understanding, that even landforms, “bodies” of water, and the air we breathe might be “spirited” or have their own sort of consciousness. He’d traveled a long way from his fundamentalist religious roots and scientific training.

One small part of the Times article especially upset the man: its revelation that a lot of dragonfly research is “supported”—no doubt through funding—by the U.S. military, which in Angier’s words “sees the insect as the archetypal precision drone.” Though that initially surprised him, it made sense that the military would be enthralled by the dragonfly’s amazing airborne skills and do what it could to dissect and then emulate the animal’s natural abilities for its own warring purposes. Still he found it disturbing, repulsive.

More delightful was the creature’s long lineage, which scientists have traced to the Paleozoic Era’s Carboniferous Period, some 300 million years ago. This was even before the age of dinosaurs, a time when vast swampy forests covered much of the Earth. Some of those early dragonflies were giants compared to modern species, flying through ancient forests on sets of wings that spanned the length of a human arm. Imagine the appetite of a dragonfly that size—and what its prey might be.

The thought of such immense dragonflies reminded the man of a myth he’d discovered in his quest to learn more about the animal’s cultural meanings: that dragonflies were once dragons. One version of the myth is recounted in a book given to him many years earlier, one that he hadn’t opened in a long time. As explained in *Medicine Cards: The Discovery*



of Power Through the Ways of Animals, “Some legends say that Dragonfly was once Dragon, and that Dragon had scales like Dragonfly’s wings. Dragon was full of wisdom, and flew through the night bringing light with its fiery breath. The breath of Dragon brought forth magic and the illusion of changing form. Then Dragon got caught in its own façade. Coyote tricked Dragon into changing form, and the shape of its new body became like Dragonfly’s. In accepting the challenge to prove its power and magical prowess, Dragon lost its power.”

The man liked the idea that the dragon’s hubris would lead to a less powerful but beautiful form. Yet in its own way, the dragonfly is something of a magical being, capable—as scientists have shown—of amazing feats, with a form of intelligence that we humans will likely never fully comprehend. And an essence that seems to enthrall all sorts of people, from entomologists to nature writers and little kids playing in ponds.

While the mechanics of how a dragonfly “works” has captivated scientists and military leaders, other aspects of the insect have long intrigued humans of a more mystical bent. The man’s research revealed that dragonflies have held special meaning in cultures around the world and across time. Some peoples have revered the dragonfly, others have feared it. Of course that says more about us humans than the insect.

What struck him as especially peculiar is that Asian and Native American cultures have traditionally associated the dragonfly with positive qualities—prosperity, harmony, happiness, good fortune, and purity—while a number of European societies considered it to have a harmful and even demonic nature, calling it such things as the witches’ animal, devil’s needle, and snake’s servant. Considering his own European roots, he found the latter associations troubling. What could account for such dark visions, so different from the goodness that other peoples imagined? Could it be the nature of their religions, their spiritual beliefs?

The man’s research made it clear that, for all their differences, many cultures associate the dragonfly with change. That in itself is not surprising, since metamorphosis is central to its life (and that of other insects). But if he understood his sources correctly, the kind of change that dragonfly represents is primarily of an interior sort: a movement away from the cultural or personal illusions that guide our lives but in fact hide what is most essential or “real,” and toward a deeper and clearer understanding—a clearer vision, one might say—of self, life, and the world, including its intangible aspects or what some would call the “invisibles.”

Put another way, the change dragonfly represents is a shift toward increased awareness, wisdom, and clarity. Toward authenticity.

The man considered all of that encouraging. Perhaps his unusual encounters with the dragonflies signaled he was moving in the right direction, toward a more genuine self.

The man did seem to be going through some sort of inner change. He’d begun to more seriously question and challenge many of his culture’s mainstream “truths,” its values, assumptions, and agreements; what we modern, high-tech, Internet-addicted Americans think we know about the world and the larger cosmos (or “creation”) and our place in it. He felt himself opening up to different ways of knowing the world and being in it; and what he imagined to be greater realities, beyond what either science or religious institutions can explain. Or even consider possible.

The image that kept repeating was one of himself poised upon some threshold or

breakthrough, though at times he wondered if he might be facing more of a breakdown. And while he worried that he sometimes took things (and himself) too seriously, he also sensed that he sometimes held himself back, plagued by doubts, insecurities, self-judgment.

What a jumbled mess I am, he thought. But that's what happens when things get shaken up. Then, with a smile and maybe even a little chuckle, another familiar thought came to him: I think way too much.

In the end, the man couldn't be certain what the dragonflies' entry into his life meant. And why did it have to "mean" anything at all? But he was pretty darn sure it didn't happen simply by chance. And whatever meanings or symbolism we humans might attach to dragonflies, what seemed most clear—and important—to him was that they had gained his attention and somehow stirred him, maybe even communicated with him on a level he couldn't yet understand. And this: some portal or veil had opened, if only briefly, and he had stepped through. In some strange and inexplicable way, his world had been enlarged. And isn't that saying a lot?

So that's where the story ends. Except for this: as you might have guessed, I'm the dragonfly man. And what I've shared is as close to the truth as I can get, given what I know and feel about the dragonfly incident and what I've learned since those late summer days—and recognizing there are always more layers to explore.

You can be sure I'll pay closer attention to dragonflies and be reminded how little, really, we humans know about the world (and ourselves) despite all we've learned. And I, for one, will celebrate the mystery.

Oh, there is one more piece to this ongoing story that I need to share, a recent experience I'd almost forgotten, though I don't know how that's possible. One morning while drifting through that nebulous place between sleep and wakefulness, I had either a dream or a vision, in which the broken body parts of the dragonfly I'd found in my yard—those parts still collected in a small white box, placed upon a shelf in my bedroom—joined back together to remake the complete creature. Among the many possible interpretations, this is what came to me first: a return to wholeness. And that's enough for now.