



Small Talk 

Maui Author and Environmentalist's New Books Recall Defining Era

August 28th, 2015
By Diane Ako

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You've likely seen the storefront for Snorkel Bob, Hawaii's largest reef outfitter, owned by Maui resident Robert Wintner, who lives in Kihei with family Anita, Cookie and Larry. You may not realize he's a Pulitzer-nominated author who recently produced two books: *1969 & Then Some, a Post 60s Grand Tour in Life-Defining Parable for Those Who Remember & Those Who Can't* and *Brainstorm*.

Refreshing and original, Wintner recalls a defining era and personal evolution with *1969 & Then Some* (Yucca Publishing, NY). While the 60s are often discounted as ephemeral or a social aberration, this recollection demonstrates lingering values guiding a most significant population group, the baby boomers- many of whom still hold sway in social and cultural evolution. The 60s marked history, for the first time challenging war as a concept.

Brainstorm is a first-person narrative of the author's navigation through cerebral aneurysm and hemorrhage. The riveting action includes the onslaught of trauma center protocol and denial of the patient and the medical industry. It's an interesting journey to see how he emerges from sudden collapse of physical, mental and emotional stability.

His 15 books include a Pulitzer nomination (*In a Sweet Magnolia Time*, Permanent Press, NY, 2005) and two movie options (*The Modern Outlaws* and *Whirlaway*—a Maui County Library Hot Pick for years).

For more information, visit <http://www.robertwintner.com/books/>

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What Can Animals Teach Us About Kindness And Empathy?

August 26th, 2015
By Diane Ako

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While humans are capable of acts of cruelty, greed and deception, they also possess plenty of positive characteristics such as kindness, compassion, friendliness and empathy. But why? Are those better angels of our nature something nurtured in us by our parents, or do we arrive on the planet genetically predisposed for them?

It's something scientists have puzzled over, and many of them may be finding answers not with human research but by concentrating on animals. "The idea that we could learn about kindness or compassion by studying animals might seem strange," says Peter Schattner, a scientist and author of the book *Sex, Love and DNA: What Molecular Biology Teaches Us About Being Human* (www.peterschattner.com). "But since similar genes are often found in animals and people, what we learn from animals may well be relevant to understanding human behavior as well."

Dogs are especially good species to study to learn about kindness, devotion and other pro-social traits because they have been genetically bred to display those traits, Schattner says. "Look at it this way," he says. "Dogs are the result of an extended genetic 'experiment' carried out by humans to artificially select the very personality traits that we value in them."

Another reason geneticists like to study dogs is that, as species go, they are relatively young. "Most scientists estimate people began breeding wolves for gentleness and tameness 15,000 to 30,000 years ago," Schattner says. "Compare that to humans. We are believed to have diverged from chimpanzees, our closest living evolutionary relatives, about four million to nine million years ago."

The time span is important because fewer DNA changes between dogs and wolves have had time to develop. That makes it easier – though not necessarily simple – to track genetic changes to determine what genes affect behaviors, Schattner says. Dogs aren't the only animals scientists study that could help unlock clues about human traits and their genetic origins, Schattner says. Other examples include:

- Mice and friendliness. Scientists studying the biological origins of Williams Beuren syndrome are making progress with mice. The syndrome is a medical condition that has several traits, but one of the most striking is that people with this syndrome are unusually friendly, even toward strangers.

Scientists can engineer mice to have a similar chromosomal makeup as people with Williams Beuren syndrome. One result of this research so far is that, at least in mice, the friendliness associated with the syndrome appears to be linked to a single gene.

- Siberian silver foxes, gentleness and friendliness. Research on Siberian silver foxes began in what was then the Soviet Union in the 1950s in an area where local farmers raised the foxes for their fur. A Soviet geneticist began trying to breed a tamer fox that was easier for the farmers to handle. He did this by mating the tamest males with the tamest females.

Within four generations – and a silver fox generation is only about three to four years – the animals were showing signs of

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