

# **The Elephant and the Hummingbird**

## **A Tale of Discovery and Love in the Jungle of System Collaboration**

A Story by Jim Moeser

Based on a folk tale told by ancient consultants around their gypsy bonfires.

Once upon a time, deep in the jungle, there lived an elephant. Like all the other elephants in the jungle, this elephant was big and powerful. When he walked through the jungle he would often trample some of the underbrush and knock over some of the smaller trees. Although the elephant had a gentle side, the other animals seldom saw it. When he bellowed the leaves and bushes shook, the other animals cowered, and all knew that this elephant should be respected and feared.

In that same jungle lived a hummingbird. Small, fragile, and remarkably beautiful, the hummingbird would fly and float from flower to flower. Beating her wings faster than the eye can see, she would hover in mid-air, defying gravity, and then quickly move on to another place. Although the skill and beauty of the hummingbird awed the other animals in the jungle, they couldn't quite figure out what use she was. She just seemed to spend all her time flitting from one place to another, always just out of reach and never seeming to land anywhere for very long.

One day, while the elephant was strolling through the jungle and the hummingbird was flitting from flower to flower, the hummingbird bumped into the elephant. Slightly stunned from the encounter, she fell to the ground. Fortunately, this happened just as the elephant was lowering his trunk to the ground to search for food. As he looked down he saw the hummingbird lying there, dazed.

“What happened to you?” he asked. “I’ve seen you flying around in the jungle, but I’ve never seen you just lying on the ground.”

Stunned that the elephant would even care, nevertheless the hummingbird explained what had happened. The elephant apologized, saying, “I’m sorry. Sometimes things happen around me that I don’t even notice. I just keep going on about my business. Some animals think I just don’t care, but I guess I’m just being an elephant.”

After recovering a bit, the hummingbird and elephant carried on a pleasant conversation and bid goodbye. Although they did not know it at the time, out of this chance encounter the beginnings of a lasting friendship were born.

When the elephant rejoined his herd, he told the other elephants what had happened. They said not only was it not proper for elephants and hummingbirds to be friends, but they also ridiculed the hummingbird saying they could never quite figure out what good hummingbirds were anyway. When he said he thought that elephants and hummingbirds could learn to be friends and enjoy the jungle together, the other elephants fell to the ground in laughter. But, the elephant stood up to them and said, “I’ll show you; I’ll go

ask the wise old owl if elephants and hummingbirds can be friends. And, what's more, I'm going to ask the hummingbird to go with me when I ask."

So, the next day, the elephant went back to where he had met the hummingbird the day before and told him what his elephant friends had said. Coincidentally, the hummingbird told him, she had gotten the same reaction from the other hummingbirds. The other hummingbirds had told her that elephants were just big nuisances; that elephants were just clumsy and not very bright. When he told her of his intent to ask the wise old owl, she eagerly joined in the quest to seek the answer.

After a while, as they approached the owl's nest they heard "Who's there?".

The elephant introduced himself and the hummingbird and relayed what had occurred the day before, including what the other animals said, and then asked "Tell me, wise old owl. Is it possible for an elephant and a hummingbird to be friends?" The hummingbird said, "All the hummingbirds said that elephants are just mean, and trying to be friends with an elephant is wrong. What do you say?"

After thinking a while, the wise old owl said, "Well, it's a bit unusual. But, yes, I think it is possible for an elephant and hummingbird to be friends. In fact, the jungle might even be a better place for everyone if more animals were friends with other animals. Go and tell everyone that I wish you well in your friendship." With that the owl bid them farewell. Thrilled by the owl's response, the elephant and hummingbird departed and agreed to meet regularly.

As time went on, the elephant learned more about the hummingbird, and the hummingbird learned more about the elephant. Although they were very different, they found that there were many things they shared. They both loved the quiet sounds as nighttime fell over the jungle. They both loved the morning sun. They both loved watching new life coming into the jungle, as new animals were born and raised through the early months and years of life. The elephant even learned to understand some of the songs and sounds hummingbirds made, and the hummingbird saw a gentle side of the elephant that she had never seen before. The more they learned, the more they understood both how they were different but how much richer they were for those differences. There were things the elephant could do that the hummingbird could not. And, in some ways, the elephant even envied the freedom that the hummingbird seemed to enjoy. They even began to think it was kind of boring just to be with their own kind.

As they learned more and more about each other, they each began to fall in love with the other. But, uncertain about whether an elephant and hummingbird could fall in love, they decided to once again go and ask the wise old owl what was possible. And, so they went together to the owl's nest again.

"Who's there?" they heard. The owl was glad to see that their friendship had grown but was quickly challenged when the hummingbird asked "Wise old owl; the elephant and I have become true friends. We have come to really value spending time together. And, I

know this is a tough question, but do you think an elephant and a hummingbird can fall in love with each other?"

This really shook the owl up. Although he had encouraged the friendship, this was breaking into new territory. He even, for a moment, began to regret giving his earlier advice. Never before had two different species fallen in love with each other, and it took all his courage and wisdom to finally say "Yes. This is a difficult thing, but I think it is possible for an elephant and a hummingbird to fall in love with each other. And, what's more, perhaps the jungle would be a better place if more animals could follow the example you have set. Therefore, I wish you well." The owl bid them farewell, marveling to himself how wonderful and challenging a step the elephant and hummingbird had taken although a bit uncertain of where this love would take them.

The love between the elephant and hummingbird grew stronger each day. It wasn't long before they decided to proclaim their love for each other in a marriage ceremony. Now, a marriage ceremony in the jungle is not quite the same as what we think of. There's no dressing up or big dinners. There is no cake or bouquets to be thrown. But, it is a time at which a mutual commitment is made to each other in the presence of family and friends.

When the elephant and hummingbird announced their intentions to the other animals, of course the other animals all said "Impossible. This can't possibly work out. I mean an elephant and a hummingbird happily married. Unthinkable." But, they got their friends to agree that if the wise old owl said their marriage could work, they would give their blessing as well and attend the ceremony.

Once more the wise old owl, faced with a new idea, thought and thought. Inspired by the success the elephant and hummingbird had shown, he finally said "Yes. I think a marriage between an elephant and a hummingbird can work. I give you my blessing, and I would be honored to attend the ceremony."

And, so the elephant and hummingbird were married, making a lifelong commitment to each other. The other animals looked on, as much with curiosity as joy. Some even whispered to their friends "This will never last.". But, through good times and bad, the elephant and hummingbird remained true to that commitment.

Of course, as time went on, they began to think about a family and wondered about having children. There was only one thing to do, namely ask the wise old owl whether it was possible for an elephant and hummingbird to have children and how to go about it. And, so they again set out for the owl's nest.

"Is it possible for us to have children?" the elephant asked. After much thought, the wise old owl said, "You have tested my wisdom more than any other animals in the jungle. You asked me if you could be friends, and I said yes. You asked me if you could fall in love, and after much thought I again said yes. When you wanted to get married, although I knew it would be difficult, again I said yes. Now, you ask me about having children. You have proven the other animals wrong so far and accomplished more than anyone

could have ever imagined. So, with faith that all things are possible, I again say yes, you can have children.”

The elephant and hummingbird were overjoyed at the response, for they could not have ever imagined this was possible. But, they wondered, how was this possible. And, so the hummingbird asked, “You have said it is possible for us to have children. How can that be done?”

Now the wise old owl was truly challenged. This required further study, and so he told the hummingbird and the elephant he would have to research the question and send them a report. Day after day passed, while the elephant and hummingbird waited for the owl’s report. Finally, it arrived, and they eagerly opened it to find a long dissertation about the nature of the question and the implications of various answers. As they neared the conclusion of the report, they grew excited. But, when they got to the end, there under the section titled “Recommendations” was the simple sentence:

“I don’t know the answer to your question. I’m into theory, not implementation.”

Well, the story could end here. Or it could go on, depending on what you want to believe. Is it possible that after overcoming so many barriers, the elephant and hummingbird have met a barrier that could not be overcome? Or, based on their commitment to each other, will they find a way to raise the next generation that **begins** where they left off? Only time will tell.

It is clear that only with the kind of courage the elephant and hummingbird showed could so many barriers have been crossed. Beyond what perhaps even they first imagined, their lives together were enriched by their differences as well as the things they shared in common. In the end, the wise old owl will not have all the answers, so they must look to themselves and the commitment they have made to each other.

The Beginning