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Walking Through Owl Country

The animal, rising at dusk
from its bed in the trampled
grass -
this is how it all began.

Excerpt from "Book of the Jungle"
John Haines, Winter News

Chapter One

I noticed a small noisy gaggle of crows that was circling distantly, directly above something that I assumed to be hidden from view by the thick forest while out walking one afternoon. Perhaps it was a dead animal, I thought, while watching the sun begin to settle behind the tall shady trees.

With a fright I suddenly saw a small group of darkly dressed women running towards me. They had materialized from the woods. I hurried to flee from them, trying to run farther down the road that I was on. But as though they had taken to flight the dark figures were quickly within arms distance, reaching and grabbing for my groin. I struggled to ward them off, but the intense feeling of violation overwhelmed me, like plunging headlong into an immeasurable crevasse; and this was combined with the difficulty of my lungs getting hold of a solid grasp of air. The fear was choking me and I felt so helpless. But then I woke up abruptly, my eyes anxious to see the safety of the bedroom walls. There was still a lingering and desperate desire to fill my lungs full with fresh air, so I rested a few minutes and did nothing but worked my lungs with several good breathes while studying the old wooden planks that made up the ceiling of the bedroom. The reassuring sound of a robin could be heard from the outside forest. It was a forest so unlike the one of my past dream, I thought. Seeing warm sunlight coming through a window I knew that it was now morning and that I had just survived my first night alone in an old, scary looking, wilderness cabin.

The previous night's rain had shuffled through the forest leaving glistening water droplets coating the wooded landscape, making the morning air smell fresh like pine, I noticed while stepping out from the cabin door, and saying good-bye to a pair of stretching Huskies that had also just awakened. Lodged behind a mask of mountains the

rising sun was giving gentle notice to the coming day's promise, ever so eloquently spoken in a quiet breeze. I had hopes for adventure and satisfaction to be found in the warm light, especially on this first day of my new teaching job.

I paused a moment while walking toward the truck, turning around to survey the old log cabin I had just spent the night in, with the thickly forested mountain range behind it. Sighing a bit anxiously, it certainly looked like a primitive place to confront one's inner demons and perhaps meet a wandering spirit or two. I knew this moment was either the beginning of a desperate experiment in living or an important sea change in my middle age. It was an idea that had been rising up inside of me like a recurring dream over the past years. It was now time to see if by being close to the hard knuckles of nature I could develop a better centered and deliberate way of living, perhaps even discover a cure for badly scarred emotions. Then apply what I learn to my classroom teaching, which soon was to be teenagers incarcerated as adults in a maximum security prison.

As I backed up and pulled out of the woods in an old truck and onto the highway the melancholy voice of my wife echoed inside of me, "Go ahead and leave, but try to come back every other weekend, and I'll plan to join you in about a year." It was a haunting voice that gnawed away at me, creating a feeling of self-imposed exile, of deliberately leaving friends, family, and community as I broke out alone into a distant and unknown landscape. Something strange was stirring inside of me, searching for realization.

"Just go and see how it works out for the first year. No sense in me packing up and following if it turns out to be a bad thing." She had a point, but it worried me to be

separated so far and so long; but hopefully the peace and quiet of the wilderness will be appreciated. Besides, a marriage is more than just always being together and watching television at night, right?

I had just left a newly rented cabin located in the Olympic National Forest, and started to drive out of the woods on to a highway that curled its way like a hungry snake through the rugged wilderness on the northern end of the Olympic Peninsula. The bedroom communities of Seattle have long since given way to a wilderness of snow capped mountains, deep water logged valleys, and a mossy covered rain forest.

It was the end of August just as the heat of summer began to fade and the sun was slowly turning a cool shoulder back toward the south. A hint of approaching autumn appeared on the mounting flocks of geese and their annual departure. August is one of the few months when rain does not hang continuously in the sky like a dark curtain, making it a prime time for vacations and adventuresome outings. Hiking, camping, kayaking, scuba diving, beach-combing, sports fishing, and even cold-water surfing were all in full swing during these late and slowly fading summer days.

Unfortunately for me, I was to spend a good chunk of my summer in prison orientation meetings learning all the strange ways of the Department of Corrections. I was a teacher dreading the idea of being held prisoner by long days in school. Even though I was hired by the local district I still had a week of prison training to painfully endure before classes started.

The road to Clallam Bay wound about with more hairpin curves than a string unraveled from a ball of yarn, tossed about by a playful kitten. Feeling that just one

quick lapse of driving diligence and I could easily plow my car into an oncoming car, I restrained from looking at the quickly passing scenes of ocean that appeared from behind the forest and logging clear cuts. Also having an endless parade of trucks loaded down with forty foot fir trees did not ease any of my fears.

The savagely wide, blue expanse of the Straits of Juan de Fuca, where icy currents continuously sucked the salt water to and from the Puget Sound, was a sight difficult to ignore. A misty, mountainous Vancouver Island, an outcropping of Canada, nestled on the horizon. When it was first fully seen, I was cruising down a lofty hill and the dawn was reflecting its light keenly off the slumbering sea. The quality of the glow at this early time of day was luminous, and it gave the water an emerald luster similar to what is seen in precious stones. From the American shoreline an ocean faring container ship and an oil barge could be seen hugging the opposing Canadian coast, slowly carrying their foreign freight to the hungry ports of Seattle or Vancouver. As soon as one ship disappeared on the misty horizon another one could be seen following it, a pattern repeated endlessly, even during the night, I thought.

After twenty-five minutes I was driving up the final wooded, steep hillside to the prison. A speaker intercom was placed just before the parking lot entrance, with a large sign telling visitors and new employees to notify the tower-guard who controls the walk-in gate that you have arrived and why. After explaining my presence a brash voice on the speaker told me to pull into the more distant of two parking lots, the one surrounded by fir trees.

The parking lot was the size of a football field and only a quarter full of cars, so finding a suitable space next to the sidewalk was quickly done; but as soon as I began

walking away from my truck, I heard high pitched, calling sounds coming from the direction of the towering prison walls that made me feel both alarmed and bewildered. There was nothing in which I knew that could make such a strange noise. I slowly crossed the parking lot, past a large garbage can with an extra thick lid I knew to keep the bears out, and up to the chain link entrance gate; all while keeping an eye on the huge concrete walls before me, thinking of various unpleasant possibilities concerning the strange, beckoning sounds. But even with this troublesome distraction, I could not refrain from staring at the towering, thick, multiple rolls of razor wire that surrounded the walls of the beige-colored institution. The building itself appeared to also be two football fields in length, and only a single story tall.

On the distant lawn that borders the road and parking lot, I could see a couple of grazing deer, but even this idyllic scene failed to lend a delicate touch to the building. Guard towers stood obligingly in each corner of the fenced-in compound, like solemn soldiers at sentry duty, giving me the uneasy feeling of being constantly watched.

At the barbed wired walk-in gate I read a sign stating that audio and visual surveillance was conducted throughout the prison, as well as physical searches of visitors. Does this mean I will be stripped searched? What a great way to spend your first day on the job! I have heard about their cavity probes.

Standing in front of me, lying on this sleepy hilltop like a beige colored bad dream, was the Clallam Bay Correctional Center, a maximum security prison that had the reputation for housing the “worst of the worst” (the ones caught anyway). It had an inmate population of one thousand and sat forlornly in the rainy, remote northwest corner of the Olympic Peninsula, in the state of Washington.

As told earlier, while applying for the job, there was only one other maximum security prison in the state and the only difference between the two was that Clallam Bay did not have a death row. It was a small city in and of itself with another thousand state employees inhabiting the dreary, intensely organized space behind the impenetrably thick beige colored concrete walls.

“What did you say your name was?” The voice squeaked out of the small metal box on the metal gate.

“Mark Adams,” I said for the second time, wondering if the intercom system was screwed up.

“So you’re one of those new high school teachers.” He sounded sarcastic, like he wanted to joke about my new job.

“Yeh,” I said and then went on, “looks like an interesting place to work.”

“Only if you make it back out in one piece,” speaking in a flat tone of voice. I expected to hear a chuckle but the speaker went dead.

He remotely opened the cyclone fenced gate that jolted, jumped and slowly slid horizontally. This would be the first of many remotely controlled portals through which I would have to pass, which clearly made the point that getting in or out this desolate place would be an affair not easily taken for granted.

“What are those strange calling sounds?” I asked, still hearing them in the distance.

“There’re some young coyotes yelpin on the other side of the prison. They’re probably pissed off cause mom left them alone,” the now gruff voice responded.

Poor critters, I thought, life works in funny ways; but I was glad that he didn’t say

that it came from the inmate population. Just a regular class of high school kids can easily turn into a den of wild animals.

As I cautiously entered the main access into the compound, a burly male officer with shaggy brown sideburns was sitting there on duty, behind a metal detector. He stopped and asked that I check-in any belongings that I was carrying, such as keys, wallet, and so forth. Then he gave me a quarter and I put my possessions into a small wall-locker on the opposing wall. Afterwards, I received a pink visitor badge and was told to wait for an escort to take me where my orientation classes were to be held. So I sat down in the lobby and grabbed a boating magazine.

Soon I looked up and a young, slim correction officer walked in and spoke a short “hi” and immediately turned about face and led me down a concrete hallway. We stopped at the first locked doorway. Not being sure what to expect I scanned. I realized that we were waiting for a guard in a remote office to see us on his monitor and open the door. So in a less than a minute the portal jumped and slowly slid open horizontally. After waiting to go through a number of these doorways, the officer spoke with a slight smile, “You know you’ve been working here too long when you go home and just stand next to your front door waiting for your wife to open it from the inside.” I quietly chuckled at this while he continued to escort me through more remotely locked doors. Then we hurried outside to the prison courtyard where numerous inmates were walking, and returned inside with more locked doors, an elevator ride, more locked doors, upstairs and finally to a room where the new school staff was assembled for their orientation training.

This was the room where I would the following week, eight sacrificial hours each day. With several tables arranged in a U shape, the room was the size of a typical classroom and painted banal beige like the rest of the prison. A large tube the size of a sewer pipe ran across the ceiling giving the room a mechanical feel, much like a ship at sea. No decorations covered the walls. But in the hallway leading to the room were a collection of nature photographs representing work concepts such as integrity, endurance, and leadership, reminders for all to do their utmost in duty. This was the inner sanctum of correctional officer training and professional enhancement. It was where the written word instructs professional practice, and classes were held to transform want-to-be amateurs into masterful prison officials. But now it was their turn to work on a small, disheveled body of public school teachers. They needed to initiate us into the stern, uncompromising realities of prison life for our safety and their own.

The only person I recognized while walking into the room was the school administrator, Frank La Push; he was on the interviewing team I had met with two weeks previously. He was a short man with a solid if not husky built including some extra baggage around the waist line. A thick, wavy crop of white hair flung itself back across his head, and his face could have been sculptured by an early Greek artist with its noble features of a high forehead and sharply angled nose, lending an admirable bearing to a man in his sixties. Wearing slacks, a long sleeved buttoned shirt, and thin slip-on shoes, he was dressed as a one who had spent much of his life in quiet, carpeted offices. Meeting me with a hard handshake seemed to acknowledge the fact that he was the one who hired me and now I

was working on his team.

“Hi there. You find a place to stay?” He asked while his eyes glowed a little while swinging his upper torso back as though to begin a long inhalation of breath. I felt he was checking to see if I had conquered the first challenge to be met by all teachers new to this remote area, which was to find a place to stay.

“I got a cabin out by the National Park. The owner will let me keep my dogs.” I did not mention what a mad dash it had been to drive from Seattle to the Forks in four hours, trying to dig up a place that would let me keep a pair of hyper Huskies, and then return home the same day. I had barely made the last ferryboat (while also getting a speeding ticket).

“What kind of dogs do you have?” his face turned curious. I immediately felt that there was more to his question than just inquiring.

“They’re sled dogs. One is an Alaskan Husky, a wolf-hybrid basically, and the other a Siberian Husky.” I turned slightly to glance at the other people in the room.

“Why don’t ya leave the dogs at home? Then you can find a place a lot closer to work.”

“They’re my babies and they’ll keep me company.” I replied in a plaintive tone of voice, doubting that he was much of an animal lover. Then I went on saying, “They can be a struggle to take care of, and my wife will be glad to get rid of them, so they don’t be digging in her yard.”

“Is your wife planning to join ya?” He kept a stern look on me, I felt.

“Maybe later.” I did my best to avoid the subject, knowing my wife and how she clung to city life, even though she had, at one time, agreed to leave. After a short discussion outlining the day’s agenda, he introduced me to another of the school staff who had arrived. Marge Ozette was a very slim, thirtyish, not unattractive, busy looking woman. She had a thick tousel of reddish hair that she enjoyed throwing about with a sly, almost conspiratorial smile that forced one to consistently analyze her motives. Her hands would literally dance about in the air like small birds, to assist her in illustrating the intricate contents of her dialogue. On closer examination cigarette tar could be spotted on her index finger, revealing a smoking habit, leaving one with the impression of her being a raw bundle of nervous energy. Frank explained to me that she was to become the Social Studies teacher, and carried with her ten years experience teaching in middle schools. Listening to her talk with the other six teachers who were gathering, greeting, drinking coffee, and generally getting to know each other, it was easy to see the uncertainties to be faced and the lessons to be learned in order to adapt to this alarming environment. I felt strongly that our students will brutally test our every weakness and conspire like a pack of hungry wolves against our well intended plans.

Next I was introduced to a middle aged man who was to become the English teacher. Frank turned and explained to me that Stephen Snyder, as he was introduced, was a Vietnam War veteran, had been working full-time for the National Guard, and has a family living on the mainland east of the

Olympic Peninsula. Stephen was of average height and built, with thinning black hair turning a wiry gray, and a very sober, downcast look to his face. He appeared to be a seriously rigid man who liked to keep to himself, especially when around groups of people, and acted as if pushed in anyway he could suddenly turn and bite your hand off. The glasses he wore gave him the appearance of intellectualism, of being one who would rather read than waste time conversing with people. He had been patiently listening to another discussion, and seemed relieved to quit them and be introduced to me.

His expression turned a bit sheepish as he said, “How do you feel about being locked inside this place? Man, if something were to happen we’d never get out”. His face paled slightly and he turned a little as though talking to the beige colored walls, as though remotely positioned prison guards could be secretly listening to us with their hidden electronics.

“There’re video-cameras all over this place, you noticed that?” he added quickly, staring into my eyes for a response.

“Yeh. There’ll probably be cameras in our classrooms too. It’ll be like living in a fishbowl. Hopefully it’ll help us to feel safe.” I said this in a vague attempt to reassure him, because he had moved closer and I could clearly see his uneasiness.

“All I can say is this is going to take some gettin use to.” He replied sarcastically and stepped back from me when he saw Frank coming in our direction with another teacher, yet to be introduced, in tow.

But before I could meet with them, a stern looking man of average height with polished black hair, wearing a dark suit and tie had walked briskly

into the room. As he began shaking hands and greeting a small group of teachers standing near the door, I overheard a nearby correction officer telling someone that he was Mr. Sultan, the prison Superintendent. So here was our opening speaker, I thought. This should be as interesting as eating day old pizza, I thought as everyone grabbed a chair.

Walking directly to the podium he spoke with a stately yet personal, self-assured tone of voice, as though he had been speaking to audiences for years. His eyes had a slight sparkle suggesting humor, perhaps especially on this occasion when he knew that his speech would be followed by days of dreary lectures by other prison staff.

“I want to welcome you to Clallam Bay Corrections Center.” He looked directly at us, the teaching staff, his body tensed slightly, turning his face to a somber shade of pale as though searching for breath. As though from memory, he droned on about the importance of professionalism among the prison staff and only by working as a team can a safe and secure environment be assured for everyone. Prisoners have nothing else to do twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week, but to plan how to deal dirty tricks on unsuspecting staff members. Then he went into how our school got started due to an inmate lawsuit. It was a teenager suing because he felt that even though being locked up in an adult prison he still had the right to a free and appropriate education, like other youths. The Department of Corrections was a bit taken back when he won and they had to set up a high school for any youth under the age of eighteen.

I could sense in Stephen, who was sitting beside me and began squirming

uncomfortably in his seat, had a desire to move away from the table and possibly get to his feet to do some walking. It must be boredom, I thought.

“You see that guard sitting in the back of the room?” I whispered to him. He turned and looked at a two hundred pound, thirty-something male prison guard sitting by the classroom door with his hands folded across a bulging stomach. His eyes were glued shut while his head was resting all too comfortably on a drooped shoulder.

I continued, “Bet ya a doughnut he’s fired by tomorrow. I heard from some that the superintendent is a tough cookie.”

Stephen chuckled a little under his breath, nodding his head slightly while looking at the sleepy guard.

Mr. Sultan stopped a second and looked at us and then grimly at the sleeping guard. Putting his hand up to his mouth he gave out a loud throat clearing cough, causing the guard to suddenly open his eyes and forced himself to sit straight up in his chair, showing that he was giving the Superintendent his whole attention.

Returning his gaze to the teachers the speech continued, “At first Shelton (a prison near Olympia) was given the job of educating them, but the kids were too much trouble to maintain; they were starting fires, living units were getting flooded almost daily by kids plugging and then flushing their toilets, fighting among each other, racial and gang conflicts, and so on. In other words, they quickly wore out their welcome.”

Elaborating farther he went on explaining how the Youthful Offender Program ultimately fell into his hands, and an arrangement was made with the local school district to provide the high school services. Looking at some of the prison staff in the room he also began to mention the controversy that was stirred up among the corrections staff at Clallam Bay; he discussed the rumors that were thick with ill-will that the guards felt toward having to tolerate and supervise a bunch of impulsive and violent, adolescent criminals in their midst. The adult inmates were rough enough, now they would have teenagers to deal with also.

Again I could not resist making another comment to Stephen, who surely had to be as bored as myself, “When is he going to talk about finding all these suckers who want to come in here to teach? He’ll get all the glory while we work the trenches.”

But at that point a strange, distant noise, like a group of people voicing a continual murmur, could be heard coming through the walls. Both me and Stephen paused to focus on it, pondering the intonations and textures for a clue to it’s’ origins.

“They’re singing.” whispered Stephen. “The prison chapel must be down the hallway. It sounds like a Moslem service. It must be a prayer of some kind.” He turned his head to listen more closely.

I sat for a couple of minutes reflecting on and listening to the hauntingly beautiful sound of humans chanting together. It must make them feel human again, even while in prison, I thought.

Mr. Sultan gave a slight smile and a devious gleam appeared in his eyes; he stepped back looking like a priest that had just finished giving communion and clasped both hands as though to begin a prayer.

He went on, “but it is going to be difficult, and the Department of Corrections will have to work closely with the school to make it happen. Unfortunately you, the teachers, will feel stuck in the middle, struggling with some of the worst offenders in the state of Washington, while also learning how to deal with the ways of correction officers. Just remember, you do the teaching and we will punish any bad behavior.” His eyes became cold and stern looking. Pausing for a minute, he seemed to be searching out and looking at each one of us, as though probing our souls. Then a struggle appeared on his face as though there was more to say, but he did not know how to express it, or perhaps felt now was not the right time.

Finally he regained composure saying, “I now want to introduce the Assistant Superintendent, directly in charge of the YOP program, Joyce Cooper. If she had not voluntarily agreed to take the program over, I doubt that I would of wanted it here. She is a fine administrator and has my full support. Thank you.”

A heavy set, middle aged woman stood up from the back of the room, her jet black hair obviously dyed, and she walked up to the front of the training room, stood behind the podium looking rather tense, and talked shortly about her pleasure in being a part of the YOP program, and planned on being as supportive to the school staff as possible. She said all the

appropriate things for the occasion, in a stoic but official manner, smiling politely only when she had finished.

I remembered her from my job interview, and she struck me as a curious woman, one of contradictions. She sat directly across a small table from me and looked directly into my eyes with one of the grimmest of stares, as though everything I was saying was suspect. I felt at any moment she was going to denounce me as a hoax. Needless to say, I struggled to not let her visibly disturb me and to finish the interview in as positive a manner as possible. But watching her behind the podium that day, giving the speech, I saw a woman who wanted to be pleasant, possibly joke a little bit, but for whatever reason did not feel comfortable doing it. There was a child still residing inside, but a lack of self confidence perhaps, block any potential expression.

For the rest of the day the classes drizzled on longer than a Seattle rainstorm and worth as much in mentioning. Frank, the principal, was seen occasionally sitting with his head falling down into his chest, eyes conspicuously closed; Marge and Stephen seemed to be yawning more often than an out-of-water goldfish gasping for air; some of the other teachers tried a variety of stay-awake tactics like standing up, walking to the bathroom, or they could be seen curiously glassy-eyed, probably resorting to an intense session of one's favorite daydream, like attending a sabbatical on "Fantasy Island".

Finally, long after lunch, with only about an hour left in the work day, a

young corrections officer walked into the room and announced that for the benefit of the school staff, a tour of the high school facilities and D unit, where the classrooms were located, would be conducted. Naturally this news brought all concerned back to life, like throwing a bucket of cold water on a half comatose hospital patient. Soon we were escorted from one end of the institution to the other, walking jauntily across the central courtyard of the facility. Numerous prisoners were also afoot to or from scheduled duties or appointments, all wearing the same institutional inmate uniform which was a plain white T-shirt, a thin, tan colored coat with matching pants.

Soon the correction officer held open the outside door to D unit for the touring school staff. We all huddled together waiting for the officer inside the unit to see us on video camera and open the final door that would take us within the unit. With a loud bang the lock on the heavy metal and glass door was released, causing it to jump slightly while the Frank grabbed the handle, holding it open for the small crowd to pass through. Inside D unit was a tall, central rotunda containing the three separate areas or pods of inmate cells. Walking into the unit we could immediately see the tall glass walls, or windows, on three separate sides of the rotunda, and behind each of them was an area of about thirty inmate cells. Each pod was painted a different color. Behind the thick glass and metal framed walls inmates could be seen clustered in small groups at tables talking and playing cards. Seeing the small tour group walking in through the outside door they stopped whatever

activities they were doing and looked at the strangers, some walking up close to the glass windows, to spy on us as though we were the ones on exhibit.

“Meet your teachers,” announced our escort.

A surprised if not a dazed look suddenly appeared on most of them. Many of youths stood up from their concrete tables and walked closer to the glass windows, wanting a better look at us. A few started laughing and pointing, speaking excitedly to their friends. Others just smiled standing where they were to take in the scene as though it was a movie just starting for their amusement.

“If you have any questions to ask, now is a good time” yelled the escorting guard to the youths.

“Is this going to be a real school?” shouted one youngster.

The principal looked at him and said, “We’re going to try.”

“Who’s the Social Studies teacher?” yelled another inmate.

At this Marge raised her hand with forced smile on her face. The youths saw her, some pointed their fingers, others started to laugh some more.

“But what if I don’t know how to read?” shouted one youth standing in the middle of a group of buddies who were giggling to themselves.

“We can teach you,” again replied the principal, standing in the middle of the teachers with his arms folded across his chest.

We continued to walk slowly in a half circle moving from the first, to the second, and finally to the third pod, all the while trying to answer their pointed if not sarcastic questions the best as we could.

One of the Hispanic youths pointed at Stephen and asked what he taught.

“I’m the English teacher,” he proclaimed rather proudly, pointing at himself.

There were more chuckles from the inmates. Most of them stood in small clusters of what looked like supportive peers, while a few others sat by themselves or leaned alone against the concrete wall. How grim, I thought, what a terribly grim sight.

“You guys looking forward to going to school?” Stephen quizzed back.

“No. You looking forward to teaching?” was the immediate reply of one smiling, black youth. His peers gave out a laugh.

“Yes,” he boldly responded. “I think it will be interesting to see what you will want to learn.” He paused for a second then continued, “Do you want to get a high school diploma?”

This caused some discussion among the small cluster of inmates who had questioned him.

“I think you stumped them on that one,” I said. Stephen looked at me and smiled.

From there we walked through another locked door, a long hallway, and up a flight of stairs to the classrooms. It all looked as empty and sterile as any high school during summer break, without the kids or teachers. The standard offices, a staff break room, and seven classrooms, made up the whole floor. Many of the room’s heavily barred windows looked out to the surrounding forest and grasslands. A guard station was located mid way down the hallway, being only a small card table with two opposing chairs.

“Anyone have any questions?” Asked the escort, who seemed to be growing bored with the excursion and wanted to get it over, perhaps to have a coffee break

A few of the teachers had concerns, mostly about placement and duties of guards during school time, another about a bell to signal class changes, but as we all knew the business of schooling. The mystery here was how we were going to do it in a maximum security prison. But it was still early with much planning and preparation to be done. Seeing where we were to be working helped us to visualize how to transform a sterile, gloomy prison into a place of learning.

When the tour ended, I decided to head straight for the exit. I casually side stepped an informal gathering of teachers who were talking about having a meeting. A meeting about having more meetings, I thought. Marge, the ever perky thirty-something going on twenty was ahead of me, taking long strides down the brightly polished hallway.

“God I need a smoke,” she crooned turning back to glance at me.

“I just need some fresh air. This re-cycled stuff makes me light headed and claustrophobic,” I replied as we returned to and entered the main access room and I started to open the wall locker that held my car keys and wallet.

“That’s why I moved out here, for the fresh air.” I continued, and then looked up to see that Marge had hurried far ahead of me toward the front gate. Beyond the fence I could see the tall fir trees bathing in the afternoon sunlight.

Chapter 2

Ten minutes later, after picking my key and wallet from the wall locker, and being released from the prison grounds by a guard in the tower, I was

back on the highway heading east for my cabin in the woods. I felt free again. The Alder trees near the roadside were beginning to loosen their dry leaves and smoke was drifting out of an old farm house, all signs of summer fading to an end and cooling temperatures arriving.

With time now to relax and reflect my mind wandered back to my wife and how I ended up working and living away from her. During times of beginnings, while going through a sea-change, one looks far back at the winding roads of life, converging on the present only to ask how did it all take place. I thought back six years to a painful struggle with bone cancer, losing partial use of my left arm and leaving the military with a medical retirement. Later, I was teaching school in Seattle's Chinatown and getting tired of the bad traffic, of a noisy, polluted, crime ridden, over-populated environment, (the sight of some pervert exposing himself on a street corner, just as kids were leaving school, will never leave my mind). So life had left a scorching impression on me and here I was now looking for sanctuary, for a place of peace and hopefully a chance to discover a greater sense of meaningfulness to life.

Earlier I thought about moving to the north shore of the Olympic Peninsula, and remembered having a job interview in Neah Bay, an Indian reservation on the remote northwest tip of Washington State, and how I enjoyed the idea of living there. A desire for the wilderness, for solitude in God's Country, drew me to its rocky coastline that etched out a pure and unspoiled land.

My wife came back to mind: a devoted family woman who still struggled with emotional negativity and depression. She felt persecuted by my numerous failings, and I

had felt hounded by her criticisms; I was never helping her enough and feared her frustration and anger was causing me to become bitter. As a teacher I could not let that happen. By having so much power in the classroom teachers hold no right to become angry, much less to vent it on students.

Driving up to the cabin the side road tunneled through the sunlit trees and tall bushes. Then just as I turned sharply to enter the gravel driveway the huskies saw me and started a maniacal howling, jumping at their leashes. Then the neighbors' dogs, a block away at the end of the road, starting barking raucously. I was as happy about seeing my dogs as they were to see me. Orion, a male wolf husky, began vocalizing as though he was making a couple of long drawn out vowel sounds; while Suka, an older blue-eyed female Siberian Husky, did her low pitched nose-up-in-the-air howl. Having been on long chains for the day, they as much as myself, were ready to escape into a free and easy evening hike through the towering woods.

Eluding the lunging dogs, I unlocked the cabin door, swung through the kitchen and around the wood burning cook stove to see my cat meowing at me from the center the small living room.

“Did ya catch any mice today?” I bent down to gently pick her up. “You know that’s your job now, Kitty,” speaking while rubbing her stomach and listening to her purring. It wasn’t the most imaginative of names, but being a stray cat that I unintentionally adopted while still a kitten, it seemed appropriate.

“And no more going outside. Those dogs will eat you alive.” She gave me a fierce but sensitive look from out of her thick brown and yellow hair. After a second meow I put her down and she scampered off into the bedroom, her tail sticking high into

the air like a fluffy feather.

In three minutes I changed into sweats clothes, hiking boots, shoved a wad of toilet paper into my pocket (just in case), and went outdoors and unleashed the excited dogs; with Suka snatching the lead they immediately charged across the dirt road to the neighbors' log house, forcefully confronting their alarmed and indignant dogs. The two black German shepherds quickly retreated around and to the back of the garage, while my dogs circled within and claimed the neighbor's driveway for themselves.

Having walked out on to the road and following behind apprehensively, looking for the occupants of the dwelling, I quickly passed their property. Then climbing over a large pile of boulders at the end of the road I found the trailhead. After whistling twice the dogs joined me and began running in advance down the abandoned, moss covered stretch of highway which served as a trail long side the glacier fed Sol Duc River.

The mountain range reached straight up a half a mile on one side of the trail, while the bright blue waters of the river turbulently churned thirty feet below me on the other side. An occasional yellow highway line could still be seen down the middle of the trail, beneath the fallen rocks, moss, sparse grass, Autumn leaves, pine needles, branches, and mud of generations of disuse. Alder, Douglas Fir, Hemlock, and Maple trees reclaimed their natural territory quickly, causing the road to tunnel beneath their long sprawling branches, all within a few years after the cars had stopped passing. Large dark basalt boulders, broken loose from the cliffs during the carving out of the mountainside in the building of the road, now stood upon it like wilderness sentries. They too had apparently reclaimed their natural territory. At one

point, where the river poured forcefully into a tall cliff and then a sharp turn to the south, parallel to the old highway, nearly half the road broke off and fell into the icy waters below, showing the reason why the it had to be abandoned. At several spots small creeks could be seen draining off the mountainside, across the width of the roadway and then running several yards parallel to it. A few more rivulets either cut across the moss engulfed pavement or a culvert was built letting the water flow under it and down into the cold Sol Duc River. Everywhere the trees in the forest are clothed in dense green moss, many with large rolls of it sagging down from their branches like oversized wool sweaters.

After walking a quarter a mile, I came upon a trail leaving the roadway and veering up into the mountainside, leading three and a half miles to a ranger's look-out, according to a marker at the trailhead. With both dogs again charging ahead of me, I started up the narrow bushy path just to get acquainted with it. After straddling over a couple of fallen Alder trees, delicately navigating a log bridge, fording a some shallow streams, and climbing up the it's never-ending switchbacks, I could quickly sense how the trail wound up the steep mountainside.

It would take just as much work walking up the stairwell of a city skyscraper. But here was a second-growth forest, enwrapped by sunlight, covering a ridge that ran directly behind the cabin. It was far from being a track inside of a health club.

After thirty muscular minutes of hiking uphill, I stopping on the trail, noticing that the feel of the mountain was good, revitalizing, and could easily flush out of my system the worries, frustrations, and the odd collection of emotional baggage brought about by life's issues. I slowly started to sense in nature a power that could heal.

I felt recharged from the hike as I got back to the cabin. The fresh air, exercise, being out in the woods with my two hiking buddies, all seemed to flush out of my system the worries, frustrations brought on by my first day on the job. I have always sought insight and comfort through the footsteps of my life. By being in the forest I felt liberated from the dog-eat-dog world of man and I liked it. The simple rhythmic pace and natural sounds and the presence of the primeval forest seemed to create a heightened sense of awareness of my connections to the vast, unending wilderness that surrounded me. It was then I knew, on the walk back to the cabin, that this part of my experiment in leaving urban life for the wilderness and for peace of mind would be successful.

An hour had past since I left for my hike, and it was nearing dinner time when I returned. The dogs were easy to hook back up to their leashes. Orion would stand guard in the front yard and while Suka would be leashed to the carport. I gave them fresh water and more dry dog food. While standing near a chopping block in the carport, I knew that later in the evening I'd let them into the cabin to relax and maintain a sense of family bond. Suka sat in the driveway, looking majestic with her white husky face, surrounded by thick black hair. Her paws resembled furry mittens. Orion was leashed in the front yard sitting alert, like a guard on sentry duty. He had the body and mind of a wolf, but the life experiences of a domestic dog. As he stood there his white, gray, and black hair patterns accented his lean but sturdy profile. Having seen him in action against prey and other tough, vicious dogs, I learned to greatly admire his agility, intelligence, and strength. He was one of those dogs other dogs learn so much

from. He could never have made it in the city, never feeling free there. After too many escapes and neighbor complaints, I would have to get rid of him. But way out here in the country, with this huge National Forest, even though it may only be an hour a day of freedom, he had a chance to thrive in the way God had intended for him. After all, the hour a day hike was as important to me as to them.

Turning away from the dogs, I concentrated on the task at hand, namely chopping the evening firewood. With a wood burning cook stove, the fire chamber is little, so the wood needs to be chopped small. Fortunately, I was not planning to cook with the stove, just using it to help heat the cabin. Grabbing a log from the wood pile, I stuck it upright on the chopping block and swung the ax one-handed style, slicing it cleanly in two. If my friends back in Seattle could see me now, they would know I was crazy. With one arm disabled from cancer surgery, I'm out in the woods chopping wood with the other. Hopefully I'll never miss and bury the ax into the calf of my leg. But the work felt safe. I knew what I was doing, plus if I miss there is a hospital in Forks, thirty miles away. Next I laid down a three foot long tree limb, planning on chopping it in the middle to make it shorter, since the diameter was already small enough for the stove. Whack! Alder was a pretty hard wood, I only made a dent. Again, I raised the ax over my head and then swiftly - Whack! Half the limb flew left, out into the backyard and the other half flew into the ceiling, disappearing behind my head and then suddenly, Whack! crashing down on my receding hair line. Dam that hurt! This wood really is hard. Fortunately, there was no humiliating damage to my forehead, only a slight case of startled nerves.

Finally, with a bundle of wood in arms, I enter the cabin to start my

evening meal. With dry wood the fire jumped into a quiet roar easily and planning on only having cold cereal with banana for a meal, I was soon sitting down at the kitchen table. A large picture window viewed out to the front yard where I could see Orion lying in the front yard and two large Douglas fir trees, each about a hundred feet tall, bordering the property.

With Kitty curled on my lap, I plugged my laptop computer into the phone jack and was quickly online, reading distant newspapers, searching topics of interest, and checking email. The log cabin and surrounding environment was so quiet and it had a soothing effect on me, even though I was sitting in a darkly painted, brown interior. It was similar to the many rooms of my younger years where I would sit with only a reading light, surrounded by darkness. The ancient log interior included two bedrooms and a bathroom with claw-foot tub; a third back room I planned to use as a large walk-in closet, mainly because the cabin had no closets. The doorways in the bedrooms were of irregular shapes, with no doors. Perhaps I could find a couple of Indian blankets to use as door curtains. Total living space was about 900 square feet, which was plenty of room for only me.

During the night the side carport would shelter both of the dogs from the rains. Looking over the structure more carefully than when I first saw it, I realized that it must of been built in sections, starting in the fifties as the landlord said. She was also selling it. So if I wanted to stay there long, I had better decide whether I wanted to buy it or not. Thick cobwebs could be seen clinging to numerous places on the walls and ceilings. The kitchen had what looked like an exterior window on one

wall, but only a bedroom was on the other side. The bathroom had plaster on the inside with foot wide, old growth wood planks on the outside, not logs; the two back rooms also had old growth planks for exterior walls with log and plank roofing covered only with tar paper; both bathroom and the two back rooms had to of been built later, adjoining the main section of the original log cabin. A small attic could be accessed through the ceiling in one of the bedrooms, but telling by the clusters of cobwebs present it had not been used by the previous renters.

The cook stove fire was going well by the time I finished with dinner and the Internet. I sat down in the rocking chair, near the front corner of the cabin, grabbed a book to read. An old fashion, vacuum tube radio at the rear of the living room was tuned into CBC, from Victoria, Canada, where they were talking about the problems of their medical system. The mountain range between the cabin and Port Angeles blocked any dependable stations from the east, so only stations from the north, or Canada, are reliably worth receiving. I liked being able to listen to nonpartisan, informative talk, and some music, without commercials; plus, I tended to see in Canadian radio a refreshing perspective on American life and politics.

About 7:30 PM I put a video in the TV/VCR combo I had brought with me and sat down in my rocking chair. I had found the day before that the local libraries were stocked up with many of fine movie classics and good documentaries, so I saw no need in thinking about a satellite disk. About an hour of video watching a night would be enough. The two dogs were let

in, but quickly the cat hid behind the corner of the wood stove and suddenly ambushed them as they unknowingly approached. Inside the cabin they seemed to sense the importance of leaving the cat alone, that she belonged to me; but I still feared that once outside it would be a different story. They took their seats beside me near the rocking chair, and the cat, a bit tense, curled up in my lap.

I was enjoying Paul Newman in an old movie “Hombre”, halfway through a glass of wine, and sharing a bowl of salsa and cheese popcorn between the dogs and I, throwing kernels for them to gulp down, when the telephone rang.

“Your mother will not leave your farther alone.” It was my wife and she sounded like a woman at the end of her rope.

“Every time Dad goes to sleep, she tells him to get up. And if he tries to get up he starts to fall, because he can’t walk. I keep telling her to leave him alone but she won’t.”

Trying to help her to deal with both of my parents who have Alzheimer’s I said, “Put Dad on the couch where he can’t get out of it. He can sleep alright there too.”

“I know. But she still bugs him, and one time he even bit her.”

“Mom is just bored. She doesn’t know what else to do with herself.” I said.

“Bored? We just got back from a long drive. How could she be bored? I think she just doesn’t like to see your father sleeping, because she cannot sleep well. I’m that way sometimes. If I see you sitting and relaxing, not doing anything, than I get mad.”

“You like to pick on me.”

“But I only ask that you work for me a little while. Maybe an hour here or there.” I thought this was an interesting comment; maybe she was mellowing out, becoming more compromising?

She continued, “God, my body can hurt though. My back gets sore, sometimes my head aches. Something is wrong. I need to see a doctor.”

“I think it is stress. You always had a lot of stress and never learned how to handle it well.” This is the woman I once had to stop after she had just grabbed a butcher knife and was going after Orion because he had dug up one of her plants.

Trying to make a point I went on, “Lisa, you’ve got everything you have always wanted. A nice home, a good car, you make good money at home taking care of Mom and Dad, your daughter who is helping you at home, but you still aren’t happy. These were all the things you dreamed about having when we first got married.”

“I know. The only time I feel good is when I am working in the yard. It is like therapy for me.”

From there the conversation slowly became centered on money issues: I needed money to fix the truck, but she still had home repairs to make. If I were a “handyman” she wouldn’t have to hire someone else to do it. Before the dialog turned into an argument, I insisted that she hang up and let me go to sleep. I had a long day, was tired and afraid of breaking my number one rule in marriage, “if you cannot say anything nice then don’t

say anything at all.” Fortunately, she was in a mood to understand and decided to let me go.

The smaller of the two bedrooms had two outside windows and a single sized bed, while the room with the queen-sized bed only had one window facing the carport, where the dogs slept. The smaller room seemed cozier and I liked the outside windows, so I picked that room.

After putting the dogs out for the night, I placed a space heater in the bedroom and lit candle for atmosphere. Two thick blankets should see me comfortably through the night and as I sat on the bed side I could hear the rain that unknowingly had started earlier in the evening. Its gentle pattering on the thin layer of roofing could be heard easily inside. Kitty came bounding in, jumped up on the night stand, obviously waiting for me to retire for the night. I blew out the candle and quickly drifted off to sleep.

Chapter 3:

The dark band of morning clouds were wrapped in an obsessive embrace about the mountain tops and the sky played bewitchingly with the weather. It was misting at the cabin as I began the drive, then changed into a heavy rain down the road, then light rain, finally back to mist, and so on, as I continued driving through the wooded countryside to Clallam Bay. It was a drive that was becoming routine, having done so for more than a week, with the prison meetings extinguished only to be replaced by equally dreary staff meetings, to discuss operations of the new school, for September was nearing.

Only a few cars and trucks with burning headlights were seen sloshing through the wet roadway in the early hours; mostly desperate commuters traveling an hour between Forks and Port Angeles in search of livelihoods. But for every car seen, I counted two full logging trucks racing going east.

It was during this wet twenty minute commute to Clallam Bay, as a cloud enclosed sun began to rise on the day prior to the beginning of school; a day when the staff was to meet, discuss, and prepare for the coming classes, that my memories could not resist returning to when I became a teacher. As my truck windows began to slowly defrost, warming up at sixty miles per hour, my thoughts raced back to when I was leaving the military. After processing a medical retirement from the Army, while living in a small apartment in the gang-banging section of Tacoma and getting a divorce from a wife who had left for military duty in Germany, I had started my arduous studies to become a special education teacher.

Eventually getting my first teaching job in a small town, I remembered how the job was overtaken by an incredible amount of paperwork, legal deadlines, hostile meetings with parents and administrators. I realized how teachers and students were expected to fit into the traditional, public education mold, making all the right responses, with little said about nurturing and strengthening the awkward individuality of adolescents; for youths have a need to make discoveries of their own, like a sense of their own uniqueness and character. Perhaps it was because of my past ordeal with cancer, the emotional scars that still had not left, but I felt strong that it was important for youth to acquire a resilient, resourceful sense of inner

personal truth. They need a good understanding and appreciation for their own communities and ways of fitting into it. Especially when so many are struggling and trying to grow up in our fragmented, drug-filled hyper-commercialized, brutally insensitive society that is rushing dangerously into a doubtful future. These were the thoughts that had been haunting my mind and I hardly dared to confess them to other teachers, fearing they might not understand, or worse, think me weak and excessively sympathetic. But I could not resist strange feeling that teachers should help kids learn how to “center” their lives, though in many ways I was not even sure what I meant.

I had just driven on to the top of Burnt Mountain, careened around one of its hairpin curves when a fallen tree appeared to jump out on the road directly in front of me, giving no time to stop. I abruptly swerved into the on-coming lane and through the top bushy limbs of the tree as it raked across the truck, snapping off the antenna. I immediately pulled over to the rough, shoulder of the road, and walked slowly around the truck to inspect for damage. Seeing no new scratches, dents, or broken parts besides the missing antenna, I quickly got back inside and continued the morning drive down the north face of the mountain. No big loss I felt, being so far in the country I could not get much on the radio any ways, and maybe the peace and quiet would make my commutes more of a time for meditative repose and personal reflection. It would give me a chance to better collect my thoughts and focus on the issues central to my struggling life.

At least I'll be rid of those sickening commercials that come screaming out of the city airways like a horde of winged banshees, I continued on ponder.

I reached the last curve on Burnt Mountain and the road began to straighten out nearing the coastline when I saw a large northwest crow fly directly overhead, following the road in the direction opposite from which I was driving. I remembered seeing them quite often flying aloft in this manner, probably searching for road kill. Dam scavengers, they were always looking for the easy prey to eat, having no will to hunt. It's a good thing I didn't become breakfast for them with my minor incident, but then, there was always tomorrow.

Settling down once again into the drive through the rolling hills of the coastal shoreline, I could still sense the inner stirrings of frustration and anger. It was the lack of concern for any need of "community" at school and an intense preoccupation with procedures and paperwork that caused so much of my pain with administrators, making me want to leave teaching.

In college I was told that special education was based on individual needs. I saw kids coming into the classroom with a dire need for an adult to believe in them, to help mentor them. Someone that could assist them in learning how to believe in themselves and their own inner truths. Someone who could help them believe that life could offer more than just alienation and failure. I saw kids who carried around so much emotional estrangement and hurt that it was difficult for them to think. They did better working with their hands, but they were constantly being forced into classes of intense reading and memorization.

Most of the school staff was not interested in getting to know and being very involved with their students, especially the bad ones. Teachers were expected only to be

dishing out the academics and testing and managing behavior. But I could also see the intentional discouragement to not be thinking outside the box, to not be rocking the institutional bandwagon. I could not believe it during those years! I had kids drowning, destroying themselves with self-defeatism, heading for self-destruction, and I was expected to focus on reading, writing, and arithmetic.

Whatever happened to classroom as community, a safety net for kids, a place with heart? Did it ever really exist? I felt so strongly that education should also include what we learn simply by being open and honest, to better understand what it means to be human. This is what I needed to be teaching, it was part of my mission as a teacher, but I was afraid to articulate it to my peers. I believed there were some days when the teacher should simply sit listen to their students, and work on genuine classroom-as-community building. Unfortunately for some teachers if they were to do this, what they experience may frighten them; they may discover a lie they had been living. Instead of being a person with status, a true professional, they may come to see themselves as just another “brick in the wall”.

Shaking off these morbid thoughts, I pulled off the road where Highway 101 intersected with Highway 112; it was only a few miles east of Clallam Bay. A lone gas station was all that remained of the town of Fairholm, which once was a place of a few hundred mostly logging families, as told to me by a prison guard the previous day. The houses had dried up and blown away; leaving only a few scattered residences nestled in the nearby woods. Somehow it reminded me of my hiking trail: like the abandoned highway, it once was a busy center of human activity, now it was slowly being reclaimed by the surrounding forest.

The gas station was a converted, old two storied house, vacant upstairs. It appeared to be doing fair business, enough for the owner to feed a small family, but forget about fancy vacations to Florida. Walking into the store a couple of loggers dressed in worn out bib overalls were sitting, trading stories at the small counter, chuckling between wise-cracks and sips of coffee. I don't think they bought any gas, but I got \$10.00 worth and a doughnut. Then I quickly glimpsed at the headlines of the local newspaper ("Local Fisherman Missing") and returned to fill up the truck. It was the only gas station between the cabin and Clallam Bay and for better or worse, these people would get to know me through regular stops.

Driving on, heading past an open stretch of sandy ocean beach at Slip Point, my mind returned to memories of how I enjoyed working with kids even the difficult ones, and felt it to be an important experience. I slowly discovered how I could turn youthful despair into hope, frustration into confidence, darkness into light. I came to see teachers being like a beacon, a lighthouse on a dark and foggy coast, where troubled youths were like passing ships lost in the night (of course, some of them crashing horribly on the rocks).

As seeing the farm houses, barns, and horses grazing in clover filled pastures became more numerous, I knew that Clallam Bay was near. Staring blankly at the road I continued to dream back in time, still trying to put together the torn pieces of my life, drifting off to see many of the distant failures and successes merged, fall apart and re-emerge. All this only to carry me forth on a long, dreamy drive down a curvy coastal road, bringing me through the forest to a concrete prison surrounded with mountains of twisted barbed wire. To a bleak but fortified wooded hilltop overlooking a

wind-swept ocean that was enshrouded with mist and rain.

What should I had expected from this new beginning? Was I being drawn farther from the all important, central issues of life, such as love and marriage; or perhaps it was a chance to find life's flowing bounty, a treasury throve of happiness that can only be drawn from the kingdom within? Or would it be another trial by fire?

It was a grizzly gray morning when I got to the prison the next day. Even though it was still technically summer, it felt like winter weather. I had walked under the scrutiny of various security check points, the sliding metal doors, and into the courtyard, where I stopped to pick up my classroom keys from the control booth. It was there I encountered Ted Sappho, the math teacher. He was a young, energetic, bearded man in his early forties. I stood beside the large metal box that slid open to the outside, like a drive-in bank-teller box, from the beige concrete wall, with darkened one-way windows. Ted threw in his "chit" or metal identification tag in the box, waited a few moments while the box remained closed, we talked about the cool weather, and then the box re-opened with his classroom keys. His eyes shined with an enthusiastic sparkle for practically any endeavor, and he talked often about outdoor adventures. He was the shortest among the staff, deeply intellectual, but there was a strong competitive streak that was apparent in his nature, making one cautious of getting too close. While interacting earlier with a group of teachers, he would often speak of past, risky escapades that none of us would dream of doing, like rock climbing. Then when caught alone he proved to be fairly evasive on personal matters, preferring to talking about sports, current events, or

other more formalized, abstract matters. All this while still having a face that looked sensitive, vulnerable, with dark darting eyes that looked discerning. He reminded me of a crystal vase: admirable in shape, character, and content, but must be handled carefully.

While walking down the covered breezeway to D unit, we stopped to see that the large, central courtyard had been emptied of adult inmates and a prison guard was making an announcement on his radio to go ahead and let the eighty or so YOP youths walk back to their living unit from their recreation time in the “yard”. While standing there we could see them filter through a small, distant doorway like ants crawling out of a hole in a huge concrete wall. Their attitude was obvious even from a distance, as they joked and jostled with each other, clustering in small groups within the larger collection. They acted as any gathering of teenagers on a mall stroll. They were tall, short, skinny, or fat, including the acne; visages of adolescent individuality slowly emerged as we closely watched them pass. They behaved in a unworried manner, as if they owned the place, and probably felt that it was only a matter of time before they either burnt the place down, flooded it so badly, and/or fought each other so bitterly, that they would be told that they were not wanted any longer and would have to move on to another institution, much like foster kids being tossed from family to family.

“What a messy horde of humanity, ha Mark?” There was an ironic look on his face as he searched for my response, hoping for humor in return. He continued, “I just hope those guarding our classrooms don’t be sleeping on the job.”

But I did not feel like returning any humor. I was depressed just seeing them all bunched up together like that for the first time. These were kids who had been tried and condemned by the State of Washington, then tossed to the wolves of the adult

criminal system as though they were beyond saving, nothing but human debris. These soon-to-be students of ours were suffering from conduct disorders, learning disorders, behavioral disorders, emotional disorders, oppositional defiance disorder, depression, chemical dependency, dysfunctional families, child abuse, poverty, gang involvement, fetal alcohol syndrome, lack of reading skills, lack of social skills, neglect, and just plain bad attitudes. I had read that they were called “hybrid-criminals” because they acted so impulsively, committing serious adult crimes.

As I was told earlier by the Principal, one had shot and seriously wounded a teacher, including a couple of fellow students. Then another had stabbed a teacher, others had murdered (including some family members), assaulted, robbed, raped, and sold every drug imaginable. The fact was that they were still teenagers. Unfortunately, the theater for this human conflict would be played out in an adult, maximum security prison; in a place the inmates liked to call “Gladiator School”.

I had to nearly slap myself loose from these nagging, morbid thoughts, bringing myself back to the present before my head got sucked too far into the swirling circumstances of the precarious situation that the school staff was soon to be facing. Besides, I was still hoping to see them as students only.

While still watching the youths walking back to their unit I said, “I don’t think any of us know what we are getting into here. Some of these kids have been sentenced to more years in jail than they’ve been alive.”

Ted turned towards me and spoke, “All I know is that the job pays good and I’m working on retirement.” He paused to look back the kids, “I’m not here to save souls.”

My mind kept twisting about with doubts and apprehension. I needed to know what I was doing there and what value could an education have for someone in prison? Many of the kids dropped out of school when they were 14. Maybe at the most we can give some hope, a chance to take their minds off of prison life, but they aren't going to care about us unless we could provide some kind of meaningfulness to their caged and angry existence. I had started to obsess over some of the thoughts that had been nagging me since starting at the prison, but in this gloomy environment it all sounded like a rotten joke. But I couldn't help feeling apprehensive, wanting to think out loud, trying to intellectually sort through the desperate situation, hoping to find a way that might give me a sense of resolve, hoping to find a sense of confidence that could be brought into the classroom, for I were soon to start teaching and I needed the job.

Having walked with Ted into D unit, past the three glass pods, and up the stairs to the floor that held the classrooms, I could smell coffee brewing down the hallway. The sound of the voices of school staff members was echoing across the linoleum, but mostly I could hear the dauntless voice of our secretary. She was a thirty-something brunette who had served time in the Air Force and had no qualms about confronting a group of older men struggling their way through mounds of work. When I started down the hallway I paused to listen for a moment. "I have plenty of paper. Each teacher has their own grade books, and I have put kids into classes in a way so all teachers should have about an equal number. Make copies of your class list and use it for attendance. The guards will check attendance to make sure no kids are trying to play hooky. Out of seventy two kids about eighteen of them are in the hole for now, so that should leave about eight students per teacher." By speaking unusually fast I could tell she felt

stressed this morning.

As I walked down the freshly polished hallway to the classroom I began to see various teachers sitting in student chairs and hear various questions and comments as they sat discussing the start of our school. It was a casual, purely social gathering of staff that had become routine in the early morning hours, just before the day officially began. The school principal was standing in the doorway with his hands in his pockets, as though he was expecting a phone call at any moment. I slipped pass him and took a seat at one of the long tables in the classroom.

After a quick sip of coffee the secretary, who was standing near the principal, continued, “The guard downstairs said that the Sergeant wants to talk with us later this morning. I guess there is “drama” planned. I think he means fighting; that some of the inmates are talking about doing or planning something bad for the beginning of school, and the Sergeant just wants to let us be aware of it. The guy didn’t go into anymore detail than that, but I don’t think the inmates are planning to give us apples.” She giggled and then paused as though trying to decipher a cryptic message still lodge in the remote recesses of her brain. “Oh, before I forget, we don’t have many pencils, just a few that I could dig up from my purse”. At that she walked out of the room and back into her office.

Great! I thought, how are we to have school without pencils? That is like trying to fish without bait. We had spent so much time in prison training that there wasn’t time for preparation. And why are there no pencil sharpeners in my room either? I sat back in my chair brooding, waiting for a chance to express my concerns.

“What this about drama? The kids going to riot or something?” Bob Townsend

spoke up. He was usually a quiet man, lost in thought, who seemed to watch the behaviors of others a lot. His eyes always had an alert, keen sense of awareness to them. He only spoke when under pressure, either from within or without, to do so.

“Now Bob don’t get everyone stirred up. Whatever happens I’m sure the guards can handle it,” replied Frank.

“Well, I just think it would be nice if we knew what was going on around here.” Bob stated in an unusually gruff manner, then he got out of his chair and walked out of the room.

“I have a question,” spoke Stephen as though he was about to raise his hand. “These guards work with the kids 24 hours a day and probably know a lot more about them than we do. So I was wondering if it would be possible for them to tell us things about them everyday. You know, communicate stuff that could help us in the classroom. Like these two guys are getting into it, so maybe they should be put into different classes. You know, that kind of stuff.” He stopped, clasped his hands and gave us a thoughtful, apprehensive look.

Bill Cravy was the librarian and vocational studies teacher. He retired from teaching in California and then came to Washington to work. For whatever reason he decided to get back into teaching, so he got a job with the high school. There was usually a sparkle in his eyes and a quick sarcastic joke to be heard from him, as he gently stuck his finger in your ribs, but now he seemed serious. Sitting back in a plastic student chair as though it was a soft couch, he suddenly spoke up and said, “I think that is a good idea, but we all are going to be too busy to sit down everyday and discuss stuff like that. And you know how kids are. There’s always things going on with them. Regular teachers in

school don't get warnings from parents saying, ""Hey, watch out - Johnny isn't feeling good today!"" I know this is a tough environment but we're just going to have to take a lot of their crap one day at a time."

"And that goes along with what I am saying too," Frank spoke up, still standing in the doorway. "Like I have said before, I think what will make this work is trying to develop some kind of relationships, so we can get to know them. And then if they are off their baseline we can tell that something is going on. Plus, to get them learning they are going to have to open up to us. We don't want them to be seeing us as the enemy here. These kids have not gone to school much, if at all. Most of our school records show that if they have any high school credit it probably came from some juvenile detention center. The small class sizes should help us to individualize more and possibly build some good relationships."

There was a silent pause in the room as though the weight of the principal's words had just dragged everyone down a few steps in a dark stair well. I was waiting for someone to raise their hand and ask how we were to build relationships with violent criminals, but no one did.

"When will we get our computers?" Ted, the math teacher spoke to the principal but then looked up to the secretary, who walked in and was in the process of handing out a sheet of paper that was a long list of behavioral guidelines that were to be posted and enforced in each of our classrooms.

"I've talked to IT (information technology) and they said sometime in the next couple of weeks. There's a lot of security that'll have be done on the computer systems so inmates will not be getting into the prison network. Believe me they will

never have access to the Internet, so don't ask."

"There's tutorial software that can really work with these types of kids. I mean, that way they can just plug into their own private space and not have to deal with teachers." Marge spoke quickly and then seeing she was not getting a response from anyone she turned and disappeared out of the room, looking like she needed a another cigarette.

"I still think teaching social skills is going to be the biggest part of this job. I mean, that's why they are here right? They couldn't get along in society. They have not learned how to manage themselves well." It was an idea that had been eating away at me and I wanted feedback on it from my colleagues, especially now before the beginning of the school year, so I could get my bearings as a teacher established.

Stephen spoke up pointedly, "You can't be teaching social skills to kids in an adult prison. Everyday is a battle for survival. These guys will chew you up and spit you out. Just think of it. Guys are beatin up and raping other guys around here. You're goin to teach them to say please and thank you? I'm just going to find whatever interests them and go with that. If they don't want to work that's fine. Then they don't get credit. If the guards think they are gettin out of hand then I'll send them out. But I'm giving them a chance for an education and that is all we need to do. Everyday I walk out the door I'm going to feel lucky just gettin there." He spoke quickly and then suddenly stopped, all while sitting and leaning back, with his hands folded so tightly you could see white knuckles.

A thoughtful silence came from the remaining teachers, as though everyone

had to digest his remarks before a personal opinion could be formed. I looked at the others and none of them appeared to really know what to do with these kids' education. As a group we had discussed the importance of providing "hope" by means of offering a high school diploma.

Not being able to resist I went on, " We talked before that this could be the last ditch chance anyone has in trying to reach these kids before they go into the adult system, probably becoming more hardened and educated by this "College of Crime" here in prison. There must be some research to tell us what works best in these circumstances."

Frank said, while still standing by the door, "It would probably be hard to find because very few high schools have been set up in an adult prison. There may only be one or two others in the country."

Reluctantly the various teachers got out of their seats and filtered back into their classrooms to begin work on the lessons needed for tomorrow's classes. Textbooks were found and brought in from a surplus discovered in Clallam Bay High School's supply room. The copy machine was working continuously as though it as the prime source of adolescent education. Other teachers were readying television sets and preparing lessons centered on a video.

To add to the general despair was the complaint that no one could tell us what grade level the youths would be functioning on, so how were we to gather valid reading and writing materials?

Another meeting of the school staff was called that afternoon, just before the end of the work day. The teachers slowly crawled into Stephen's classroom

and sat where they had previously, but now looking tired from spending so much time searching for and putting together study materials. They pulled out chairs and sat down at the long tables still covered with paper, books, and worksheets.

Before the last teacher arrived, Sergeant Barnes walked briskly in and shook hands with the principal, who had taken the same standing position by the door. The Sergeant wore the same deep blue uniform of the guards, carried a large cup of coffee and smiled at the sitting, wearisome teachers. He reminded me of sergeants in the Army, a bit over weight, mustache needed trimming, maybe missed a shower or two, some coffee on the shirt, but he knew his job like a cop knows his beat. Having lived and breathed corrections work for the last ten years, worked more over time than a slave on a galley ship, he knew prison problems and various solutions like a cook knows breakfast. At least I was hoping this was the case.

He started speaking, "I know you're all anxious to get home so let me get this over with. We received intelligence that certain inmates are planning to riot in the school, sometime soon after it gets started. There is talk going on that these individuals are trying to get others involved in the action. Now I don't want to worry people but we need to inform you just in case they are successful in their efforts to gain the support of peers, so if it does happen you will hopefully be prepared."

The principal had decided to take a chair and leaned back with hands in his pockets saying, "How should we respond if something like this happens? I mean, I can just shut my door and it will be locked to the outside. But we have teachers down the hallway. God, and if they have kids in their room," he stopped in mid thought, contemplating how it would look if they decided to break loose in impulsive,

thoughtless violence for which they were well known.

The Sergeant continued, “First, this is just a rumor and there’s a good chance nothing will happen. These characters still have a ways to go to enlist the help of their comrades. There’s a lot of inmates that don’t want to lose their good time doing something just for someone else, but it’s hard for us to tell how much pressure these guys can put on others.” He stopped and took a sip of his coffee and then continued, “But if it does start inmates will usually start breaking and tearing apart anything they can get their hands on, like throwing chairs trying to break some windows, for example. I suggest the teachers just back away from whoever they have in their classrooms and get down the hallway to the stairs as fast as they can. I don’t want anyone trying to play hero and wrestling around with these guys. Once people are downstairs they’ll receive farther instructions to regroup somewhere so a head count can be done. I am not going to leave anyone behind. The ERT (Emergency Response Team) will be on site as soon as possible and usually, once they appear, most of the inmates will throw in the towel. A few hard cores may be stupid enough to try to duke it out.”

Bill Cravy from the rear of the room raised his hand asking, “How do you know this is true?”

“We received some information that there’s been talk going on among some of our youths that once school starts they want the others to join in on a school party. That’s how they call it, a school party, hoping we won’t know what it means. But we got confirmation on these plans, so we know that something’s in the works. That’s why I’m talking to you’all now. We have our sources and once there is agreement among them, we can feel confident that the information they are giving us is true.”

Bill sat back a little, looking a bit aghast, and said what was on his mind, “Well, I guess this is a reminder of where we’re working at. Isn’t there some way we can know if and when this might happen? I mean, I think some of us are worried enough as it is.”

The Sergeant looked at him directly, “When we find out we’ll tell you. It’s important that you take care of yourselves. Let me tell you a little story. A couple of years ago I was working over in B unit and a big fight broke out in one of the pods. It must of been three or four fights going at one time, like you’d see in one of those old western movies. So we quickly sent the ERT over there, opened the door and we all rushed in to break up the fights. Man, those first few seconds in the pods seemed to last forever. My eyes were fixed straight ahead of me cause I was too frightened to want to look around. You get into such a panic that your senses go numb and seem to shut down. I could of been nailed from any side and not seen them coming. So remember, if a riot breaks out, be sure you are looking around and see what is going on; don’t freeze up and just keep your eyes straight in front of you. The more you see the better you can defend yourself and the more information you can provide later to the guards. But please, no heroics, no trying to break up fights, even if you see inmates beating someone up. I want everyone to get out as fast and as safely as possible.”

At the close of the meeting people looked more nervous than usual and scattered quickly in various directions. In ten minutes the education floor was empty of all except

Mr. Cravy the librarian. He had the most work to do, setting up the school library, which included indexing, shelving, and organizing his small but various book collection.

Being anxious also to leave the walls of prison life behind I quickly headed to the main access. The guard on the speaker gave me a polite “good afternoon” as the metal gate slid open for me to head directly to the parking lot and my truck. I decided then to stop at the library in Clallam Bay before driving out of town. I wanted to check out a video or two (maybe an old western) for the coming week. With my truck antenna gone I thought about looking at their collection of books on tape too.

Chapter 4: Clallam Bay

Clallam Bay had a population of only several hundred and that barely kept alive a modest high school and elementary school. It was a one tavern town, while a second sat on the beach just outside of city limits. The town once was a regular stopover for an attractive, but small fleet of passenger and freight steamers that followed the coastline of the Pacific Northwest, from Seattle around the north horn of the Olympic Peninsula and south to San Francisco. It sat on a sandy ocean bay that resonated with the beauty of rhythmically pounding waves. The emerald curl of brackish water would pounce in an explosion of sound as they struck the log and kelp filled beach. The waves gently stood up during the last moments of their short lives, only to suddenly hurl themselves in a heavy, thunderous surge toward the washed out shore, sounding like logs rolling, landing on top of each other. Interesting enough, other beaches I had visited did not have such powerfully sounding waves, but more submissive ones that give out a

consistently cascading, almost sleepy sound.

There was a spent air about Clallam Bay, as though history had marched past her borders without ever looking back. Sitting astride a coastal highway that wound its way to the extreme northwest tip of the continental United States, it took less than two minutes to drive through the five block town, even when slowing down for the flashing school zone lights. A large abandoned gas station sat in the center of town, using up a whole block and revealing a more prosperous past. An affordable motel near the beach appeared to be barely clinging to existence. Fishing once was an important bread-winner on the Olympic Peninsula, making many a hardy soul with even a small boat a well-to-do individual. During those earlier, more robust years the local population was triple what it was now, with many businesses standing shoulder to shoulder extending a mile west to Sekiu, which was another micro-town sitting on a lofty bluff overlooking the pale blue sea. Though

Sekiu had a small attractive harbor with a marina sheltered by a massive stone breakwater. Little business appeared to have been conducted there also except during salmon fishing season, and the salmon were declining in numbers.

After commercial fishing went bust, the logging industry gave a temporary boost to the economy, but with the spotted owl and restrict regulations on cutting down trees in the 1990's, local jobs were difficult to find, except if one were willing to deal with hardened criminals that just as soon slice your throat than say good morning. Many of the correctional officers (guards) once worked in either the fishing or logging industry. They tended to be a grim, no-nonsense, impassive group of people (men and women) that still had a deep love of the outdoors and recreational vehicles. While

walking the concrete hallways of the prison one often heard talk about camping, hunting, hiking, off-road vehicles, fishing, and instead of saying “truck” they called it a “rig”.

Seeing them in their blue police uniforms and belts containing an assortment of criminal apprehension devices (no guns), I could not help but feel glad that they were able to get out of the logging business and find a fairly comfortable state job, especially since logging had been rated as one of the most unforgiving and dangerous jobs in America. But it was hard for me to image that a seemingly tranquil forest could be more dangerous than a maximum security prison.

It was the prison that mostly supported the town of Clallam Bay, even though technically in their backyard, it sat on a hilltop that placed it far enough to keep it out of sight and mind of the ordinary citizen. In the early morning, and then just before shift change in the early afternoon, the prison guards coming into the town would stop at the local gas station for refreshments and then they turn to go directly south to the prison, which sat roughly three hilly miles deep into the woods.

There was a small library in the center of town, across from the high school, and it had a large collection of videos, many of Hollywood’s classics from a bygone era. This was becoming another of my regular stops between home and work, because I was not planning on getting a satellite TV disk for the cabin. After having walked in the small building and giving a quick survey of their holdings, I felt assured of a year’s supply of fair mind, mature entertainment before having to resort to the kids’ animated movies. Though one title quickly caught my eye concerning sled dogs, “Balto, The Hero Dog That Saved Nome, Alaska”, but I felt it could wait a few more months.

“Did you bring your card this time?” said the librarian, a middle aged woman who was looking at me scornfully. It appeared that she would never forget the time when I left my wallet in the truck and in it was my library card. But she appeared nice and simply asked for my name, typed it into the computer, and checked-out the videos.

But feeling now that she had just provoked the devil in me, I draw out my wallet and pretended to accidentally grab my Seattle library card. I had halfway handed it to her when I stopped and said, “Oh I’m sorry, that’s for King County, where they have real libraries. You see? They even put your picture on it.”

“Pictures don’t mean much. They have a bunch of them in the lobby at the post office.” She gave out a chuckle and seemed to be genuinely enjoying the mutual ribbing.

I decided to cut the conversation short, fearful of saying something too embarrassing, because I felt unsure of myself joking with a person I didn’t know well. Obviously, she was in a mood for teasing talk, which I wasn’t good at publicly. But I did like her spirit, I thought somberly while getting back into my truck. Though she was sarcastic she was still warm, friendly, and unofficial. It was quite a contrast from the way people were in the cities, with their fixation on efficiency and having emotional distance from strangers.

It was later while driving back to the cabin and through the remote woods that I thought of the many encounters in the city. I felt that the clerks did not even see me, that they were just counting the cash, punching their ticket. But then I could not blame them; long lines of people waiting seem to be everywhere in Seattle.

I gave a sigh and wondered if my wife would ever see the benefits of country life? Will she ever learn to see and value simple, natural things in such a way as to be willing to center her life there? To me it was more than a question of morality; it was a matter concerning the survival of the soul.

When I turned off the remote stretch of highway and drove down the dirt road to my cabin, I was more than ready for my evening walk through the woods. The neighbor's two black German Shepherds were standing on guard at the end of his driveway, barking ferociously. Seeing me pull into the driveway my dogs began their excited, wolfish "talk" by giving out minor howls and other barbarous forms of vocalizations.

With them straining, jumping at me in their leashes, I quickly unlocked the door and walked into the cabin. Kitty was found sleeping, curled up in a hairy ball on the middle of my bed. Not disturbing her and working quickly, I changed into sweat clothes, hiking boots, and hustled back outside to unclipped the dogs from their chains. Like a pair of four-legged bullets they tore off in the direction of the neighbor's dogs, Orion jumping over Suka in order to maintain his lightning momentum. A short but intense scuffle among the dogs started but then stopped as my dogs continued running out into the nearby woods.

As I stepped out on the front yard, I turned to look back at the cabin and then straight up to see a passing cloud encapsulating the lofty mountain that revealed a small white, forest ranger look-out station, hanging off its' peak. The sky had a beautiful, cerulean blue sheen; I could feel that autumn was moving in quickly, while the trees were using up the last of their fluid strength before succumbing to the frosty feel of long dark

nights.

While starting my walk down toward the trail head I spotted my neighbor coming out of his driveway towards me. Making eye contact with me he said, “Hey neighbor, how are you doing?”

He looked like a man who enjoyed the outdoors and was wearing denim jeans and an old sweatshirt, sporting a handlebar mustache. As he got close my sense of alarm suddenly rose up, concerned that perhaps he finally got tired of my mongrel mutts invading and fighting with his dogs.

“Good day for a walk, ha.” He spoke while striding up to me.

“Yeh.” I said waiting to see what, if anything, he was after. Maybe he was just curious what kind of man had just moved into his neck of the woods.

“Say, he know, we both share that water box up on the hillside and I’m hoping you’d help me out with it. It is the only water we got. Sometimes it gets plugged up and you got to walk up there and clean out the pipe. The stream moves a lot of rocks into that thing over time.” He paused and looked at me more intensely. He went on, “The last guy in your cabin didn’t do a thing to help me. I’d even walk over there and talk to him and he won’t come out. We use to be friends until he started acting temperamental.”

“Yeh, I’d like to help you out. Just let me know when you’re going up. And maybe you can show me how it works.” I paused for a second relieved that he was only thinking about our system of down to earth plumbing that we were using for water.

“Have you ever had the water tested? People usually don’t drink straight out of a stream now days.” I eyed him closely to see if I struck a nerve.

He was nonchalant as he replied, “Not me, but the other guy I mentioned took a sample into the county and said it came back positive for Ecoli and some other stuff. Don’t bother me. Me and my family been drinking it for over thirty years. Heck, the only thing I detect are some ass blazing farts and it keeps me regular. You know? Not a bad trade off for being free water.” He was smiling at me.

Well, I guess I had all the information needed concerning my drinking water. I had already been drinking the stuff and nothing bad had happened to me, just an infrequent gas problem. But to be on the safe side I decided then and there to start boiling my drinking water and storing it in the refrigerator.

He went on, “maybe in the spring we can build a new water box. The old one has gotten kind of rotten. I can probably get the wood we need around somewhere for free.” His body seemed to relax a little at that point, as though releasing a long held in breath. A reflective appearance showed on his face and he looked up at the mountain over my shoulder.

“Are you thinking about buying the property? She has been trying to sell it for awhile now.” He looked into my eyes.

“I’ve mentioned it to my wife and we are thinking about it. She’s not going to come out here much being a city girl. But it’s a good place for me while I’m working.”

People who live in the far reaches of the country want to be left alone,

and I had reckoned my neighbor to be much like that. But by principle he seemed a friendly, social man. Of slight built, an angular, bony face adorned with a cap, he was over six feet in height, with a healthy gray mustache, and looked every bit of seventy plus years old. He talked shortly about having raised a family, worked hard for over twenty years as a logger, later as a log-truck driver, and only recently retired to the quiet life, staying in his eloquent log home beside the mighty Sol Duc (Indian for “bright waters”) River. The sparkle in his eyes betrayed a clever, fun-loving spirit could find easy self-expression. But at unexpected moments certain darkness would spread across his face and his demeanor would appear downcast as though nursing a deep wound. It was the unpredictability of his nature that I found most difficult to understand. At first it appeared we would be the best of friends and go out drinking and carousing together like college kids; but then darkness would intrude upon his eyes like a burglar robbing his fiery friendliness and I thought he would suddenly do an about-face and return home in disappointment.

“You know what I’d do if I taught those kids,” His chuckle revealed chewing tobacco stains on his teeth. “They’d get whacked every time I heard a smart remark. Ha, they’d have to fire me!”

I remained quiet hoping he would change the topic. I had always found it difficult to talk about education to people who had not been in a classroom for fifty years.

He finally went on, “Man it’s funny, my dogs run down to the end of the driveway and wait for you to come home. Your dogs and my dogs are just goin have to fight it out, see who’s boss. I had to take one to the vet yesterday to stitch

her up. Had a gash on her nose.” He paused for a minute and then went on, “Those huskies of yours look like difficult dogs to control. Why do you keep them?”

“I really like huskies. They are probably the most intelligent and sensitive of dogs, but still have a strong warrior heart.”

He said, “Dogs love to fight. Almost like people.”

I replied, “I know. Suka had a hole the size of a silver dollar on her side, but I will leave her alone. Looks like she’ll heal up. That fur ball just doesn’t get along with other dogs like Orion does. I think she grew up by herself too much.”

Deep down inside I felt that the problem child here was Suka. Her bright blue eyes lit on fire as she would pull at the leash, wanting to show the neighbor’s dogs that she was master. It seemed that her sole purpose was to see the other dogs retreat back toward the house, just so she could parade around in their driveway acting like some conquering monarch.

Orion, the wolf hybrid, would apparently follow just to see the action, because I never saw him being aggressive. I was glad that the neighbor apparently did not mind my dogs charging onto his property like a pair of World War II dive bombers and waging war every time I got home and took them off their leashes. His dogs rarely left the property. But if I knew from experience that if I did not leash mine, they would roam like mad marauders everywhere within unknown miles of the cabin, hunting down and trying to kill nearly every creature they could find. They still had the wild in them.

“About ten years ago we had a daughter killed in a car accident. I think the best thing me and my wife did to try to heal was to go out on daily walks. Man, we put on miles, and we’re still doin it. But I kinda felt from going through it all, that our

walks in the woods really did some good. It's different in the city. I don't think that we could of walked down a city block and still got the same kind of effect, ya know? There are just too many distractions in the city to learn how to heal." He looked into my eyes with a genuine puzzled expression, waiting for my feedback.

I knew what he was talking about, and it surprised me that he expressed something so personal that fast to me. But I loved the woods and he had mentioned part of the reason why I had wanted to live there, away from the urban life, because I also had deep wounds that needed healing. Maybe seeing me heading out on frequent, earlier hikes he could sense something. At any rate, I was not ready to talk to him about it, not now any ways.

I spoke up, "yeh. I know. I think it has a soothing effect. Boy, after a day of arm wrestling with the kids at school, it really feels good to walk in the woods. It gives me a chance to wash all that crap out so I can relax in the evening."

It helped me to relax and focus on my writing, but I didn't want to talk to him about that either. How could he understand what I was struggling with when I could barely understand it myself?

We parted on that note, after fifteen minutes of talking, feeling more confident that a good relationship could emerge between us. Not having any other close neighbors, it was nice to feel that you could trust the one you did have. He went back to his house, perhaps to sit on the front porch, spending the rest of the afternoon there, watching as I disappeared behind the tall thicket of trees, heading for the river, with my dogs racing far in advance. I left wondering if he could see that I was walking into the woods not just for the exercise, but to search for a way to breathe from the soles of my feet.

Chapter 4

The dark woolly clouds rolled across the mountains in turbulent blue sheets that thickly blanket the afternoon sky. Rain was a main ingredient in this steep and ancient landscape. Everywhere one finds green ferns and moss, covering virtually every morsel of soggy ground, while within the forest, emerald colored, furry draperies of moss hang from the entanglement of tree branches. Damp moist smells of the earth reveal an ever present process of decay and fresh growth. The variety of plants can be astonishing, and when I looked upward, fog was seen softly leaning against the mountainside while its thick breath could also be felt brushing up against my ruddy cheeks.

During that afternoon we had walked over a mile into the woods. Orion and Suka both ran about in all directions with their noses close to the ground, making numerous forays into the bushes, only to reappear minutes later on the trail either ahead of or behind me. If Orion was far in front me he would stop, turn to see if I was closing the gap and then he would move on. But not Suka. Having been what I felt to be a poorly socialized, backyard dog for several years before I got her, she would simply do what she wanted, regardless of what I said or did, but usually staying within eye sight.

Halfway into the hike, I felt it was a odd to I saw Orion running back out of the bushes straight toward me. He appeared more stressed than usually, his leaps and bounds where too hurried, almost desperate. When he landed on the trail in front of me the explanation for his flight became suddenly obvious. A

large black bear also came charging out of the woods in hot pursuit.

Orion was about thirty feet in front of me and now the angry bear took the position half way between us. I had seen bears before but what frightened me about this character was the way it had an arched back with its hairs sticking up. Whatever occurred out in the woods between the two of them did not settle well with this hairy creature. And then on top of that my dog has to come running straight back to me for protection.

Having stopped dead center it first turned to look at Orion, then it turned to look at me, again it looked at the dog and then back at me.

Good I thought, we are confusing him, he does not know which to eat first!

Finally he seemed to relax the arched back, turned toward the woods from which he came, and he walked away. Feeling relieved and taking this as a chance to escape both me and Orion quickly turned around to go back. We must have gone a quarter of a mile before I realized that Suka was missing. Not giving up on a hasty retreat I started whistling and calling for her, hoping she would appear at any minute. After another quarter mile had passed she still did not show and I feared the worst. She probably was with Orion when they met the bear, but not having his quickness, the bear could have gotten her. I had to find out and not go off, leaving my dog out in the woods. Picking up a big stick I turned to go back to where we met the bear. Curiously, Orion, who usually was walking ahead of me now walked behind me all the way back. For further protection I kept whistling and calling for Suka because bears usually seek to avoid human contact. Where we reached the area of the bear encounter no Suka was to be seen, so

we went on farther. Still carrying the big stick, banging it on the ground, making all the noise possible, we were another mile down the trail when I spotted my missing dog walking down the trail as though nothing had happened. She either missed the bear confrontation or thought little of it and kept on with our usual hike. But she was easy to corral up and we returned to the trail head, ending another daily hike.

I could tell that the evening was going to be a cold one so when I returned to the cabin and reattached the dogs to their leashes, I grabbed kindling from the wood pile and started a small blaze in the cook stove. The bear incident was difficult to shake loose from my thoughts as I sat to have a bowl of cereal. The forest held so much beauty and primitive forces, but danger as well. The bear was such a magnificent animal that lived alone in the dense wilderness, the way God intended it to be. It made me wonder what else could be living out there, so majestically uncivilized and rarely seen by people? My nerves finally settled down so that I grabbed a book to read for an hour after dinner. It was a collection of short stories by Jack London, about men in search of gold in the Alaskan Klondike, but they were tragically dying from exposure, hunger, and/or killing each other out of an impulsive sense of greed. The scenes were well written, the characters and action was believable, but my interests were not greatly stirred. I could feel the idle evening air hang listlessly within the dark cabin walls. I was not in the mood to sit and read very long. The encounter with the bear had stirred my senses too much.

Later that night, just before going to bed, I sat down to my laptop on the kitchen table, and in an attempt at getting some constructive form of writing done that night I decided to compose an email for my wife, describing how I felt about living in the cabin. It follows:

“Elsie,

Hope all is going well. Everything is fine here. Thought I'd write you a letter on some thoughts I had tonight. Hope you appreciate them.

Around 8 PM my eyes grew tired from reading and so I decided to step outside and absorb some fresh air. During the night Suka usually sleeps contentedly at the foot of the cabin door, so I had to carefully step over her curled form in the dark. That was when my next step took me out in front of the cabin where I could see a zillion stars glimmering in the frosty air. The Milky Way flowed through the middle of the sky like a celestial river curling outwardly with swirling branches containing countless distant solar systems. The Big Dipper circled like a clock arm pointing to the mystic center of the night sky, the North Star, which was probably predicting the coming seasons. In the west laid Canis Major, or Great Dog, which contains Sirius, the Wolf Star, an ancient symbol of renewal. It was the brightest star in the sky and a companion constellation to the great hunter, Orion, to whom it has always stood near during their timeless journey through the night sky.

It was then I understood that a multitude of myths rise and fall within the arching winds of night that steadily swept across my small mountain cabin. All within the light of a pale moon that streamed out from behind the wall of leafless trees. Its' glow of silver light washed the southern sky clean of weaker stars. But only the portion of sky directly overhead contained visible stars, leaving my celestial views blocked by 100 foot fur trees on three sides and behind me a steep mountain.

On this clear night the air was brittle, fresh and invigorating. The surrounding forest whispered gently in a quiet breeze. The dogs lay curled and quiet and ever so contentedly, listening to sounds only they can hear. Not needing to be entertained, they were soaking in all of the night's primeval wonder and beauty. It was during moments such as these that I could not help but feel envious. I would think of Chief Seattle's comment that without animals, man would suffer a "great loneliness of spirit". While I sat in the shelter of a small cabin, getting intelligence of the world from the radio, these animals were laying in the dark comfortably contemplating the mysteries of the wilderness using only their senses. They can understand so much more than I about what is happening in the land around them; making me wonder if their senses can also teach them more about the true nature of the world than we are able to understand with ours. At times, Orion would point his nose straight up in the air and then prance in excitement, smelling a distant deer in the woods. I have to read the newspaper to know what is happening in my world, and even that may well be misperceived. I need a log dwelling with counterfeit lights and heat while they sleep outside housed only in fur given to them by Nature. I work for a living while they sleep and play. For good or bad, humans may have more mechanical intelligence, but very time I look deeply into the starry night, I fear it is only to compensate for his lack of closeness to God and the Universe.

I hope you understand. Take care. Love, Mark.

Chapter 5: First Day

"Here comes the lil darlins." A prison guard announced in a singsong

voice as he stepped from the stairwell on to the education floor and decided to give us a few seconds warning that our students were trailing close behind.

“This is where the rubber meets the road.” I said while standing in the hallway outside of my classroom, to Stephen who was doing likewise, having his room next to mine.

The students walked up the stairs in their usual jovial, could-not-care-less manner, quickly entered the education floor, then they looked at attendance sheets posted on various classroom doors to see who was to go into which rooms, filtered into their respective classes, and once there remained huddled in small, tightly knit groups, talking continuously. The noise from the animated youths bounced around easily in the large, barren, and uncarpeted classrooms. A few stragglers remained in the hallway receiving directions from the secretary who was still trying to place some of them in classes, while the principal stood off to one side watching the passage of the morning unfold, hoping for no trouble.

I stood next to the door with a smile, greeting the youths as they walked into my room. It took only a minute to begin hearing the prevalent use of profanity, and to see the exaggerated bravado of many of the adolescents. I remembered having decided earlier to work at staying calm, to choose my battles as wisely as possible, and to focus only on what was important. There was just one message I wanted my students to get from me and it was that I enjoyed working with them, that I wanted to be there, that the job was more than just a paycheck. But as could be expected they gave me the “what are you doing here” look, a couple laughed at me, others inspected the room scornfully; but still they took to their seats accordingly.

I was to be teaching a basic skills class for students who were struggling in the regular classrooms. Unfortunately since all of them were new to us no one yet knew who was functioning below average. Having various materials for building skills in grammar, reading and writing, I was to work one-on-one, or in small groups, with students helping them as needed. Perhaps idealistically, I wanted to use this time to try to become a mentor for them as much as possible.

“Good morning. My name is Mr. Cole.” I began talking while handing out paper and the few used short pencils that I could find. “Today I thought we would select an interesting topic and write about it as a group. I’ll use the white board to write out the things we talk about, explaining how sentences and paragraphs can be put together. Then you can write it out, as you wish on your own paper.” I thought it was a good introductory lesson, but the students did not seem overly enthused.

Any attempt at drawing out a productive dialogue with them quickly turned into a “we did not come to prison to go to school” comments, along with not-so-subtle, veiled threats, and angry outbursts. Often the threats would be statements like, “You don’t want to piss us off.” “You’re a racist.” “Watch it, you know this ain’t a real school.” or “You’re in our house now.” These remarks would escalate during the day due to more pressure that I was exerting to get the students to do their school work.

One student sat in his chair staring at me in the most unnatural way, through the entire class period. We both knew there was no rule against staring and I did not want to let his little trick sidetrack me from the positives, small that they were, happening in the class.

“Hey, look at the deer!” shouted a thin student with long straight black hair.

He had gotten out of his sit and looked out one of the classroom's barred windows. When peering into the meadow adjacent to the prison a couple of deer appear to be walking through it, browsing on the bushes for a morning meal.

“Excuse me, but let's get some work done first, and then I will let you look out the window for awhile.” I was expecting the windows to be a distraction, but hopefully one that could be manage as a reward for getting their work finished. Plus I felt seeing nature and its animals living as they did could have a soothing effect on their troubled lives.

I quickly noticed with the inmates that the whites stayed with whites, blacks with blacks, and Hispanics with the Hispanics. The racial divide was so stark that one could feel its' all pervading stench like a thick, morbid, smell of animal decay in that lingered in the prison air. I could tell easily in only short time that it was not racism, but rather their intense need for protection, that created the gangs.

Even during the class I had problems with arguments between youths that would erupt, their sharp voices bouncing up and down the education floor, causing the guard posted in the hallway to stroll to either my room or another classroom, to survey the guilty culprits, looking carefully to see if the teacher needed assistance. Most of these verbal scuffles were mere adolescent pretense, demonstrations to peers on how to push the institutional envelope, because in their world rebelliousness was next to godliness, that true convicts would always do what they know must be done, that only suckers worried about consequences. I could easily sense the colossal coercion that went to bear for the inmate code of conduct. Being so outspoken about their dislike for the police they

seemed to do a fairly effective job of policing themselves.

For my teacher certification I had student-taught in a juvenile detention center in Tacoma, but that was a walk in the park compared to working in an adult prison. Even on that first day, I was beginning to unlearn much of what I had been taught in college about teaching. Traditional approaches toward education were not going to work in this youthful wilderness.

Fortunately the staff had earlier realized that giving grades should be canceled in exchange for giving credit for work done. One day of satisfactory work was equal to .007 credit, and a whole month was to be .10 credit. Working through that first day of school I could even see where lesson planning was going to be difficult because of the unpredictable nature and intensity of moods among my students. How does one teach a student who just got out of the “hole”, or solitary confinement for a month? Just the thought of living in one of those barren 8 by 12 foot concrete cells, the size of a bathroom, was dreadful. I easily could sense how they became pitiable mind-drains, especially for youthful minds that were use to over-stimulated, care-free lifestyles. A brain needs sensory experiences to feed from, and I feared that the sensory-deprivation of prison life, especially in the hole, only contributed to the emotional and intellectual hardening of the youths.

I kept remembering the advice that was given, try building relationships with the students, individualize as much as possible, and do not be wearing out your classroom authority. But I kept remembering that I was teaching many kids who were sentenced to more years than they had been alive. As I was quick to discover, it was hard to build a relationship with hardened and manipulative criminals, especially when they have the

chance to gang up on you. This also made discipline difficult because the students were living together twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week and they seemed to all think and act as one. The prison guards told us that every night the youths were drawing up plans, conspiring together in some dastardly way during their evening meals, to bring down the school. If you reprimanded one, the rest would come to his defense and angrily charge you with some vulgar abuse of teacher power and how they were going to have you fired!

Doug Sequim was a slightly over weight youth who like to be alone and I started to see him as being an independent soul in a world where independence was difficult to come by. He recently had his seventeenth birthday, which to all appearances was a non-event. He liked looking out the window for deer. He had done his work and was standing at the window hoping to sight a passing deer. The other students seemed to be doing fairly well in class so I decided to walk over and talk with him

“I got a sports magazine if you want to look at it,” I said.

He gave me a hard look and said, “No, that’s OK. I’m doing fine.”

“You’ve been getting any visits lately?”

He said, “I ain’t got any visits.” He turned to look out the window again and I noticed a small scar on his cheek. “My people decided to forget about me.” Doug could be considered good looking with long, straight, jet black hair that hung just past the shoulders, and his husky if not bulky body which was ready to spring into action at a moments notice.

“Do you write many letters? I could help you with them if you want.” I just threw it out to see what if any respond I would get. I did not want to sound like I was begging just to help him.

“Sometimes I get a letter from my lawyer but that’s it,” He said without looking at me. “When you’ve been locked up as much as I have you forget about stuff like that.”

“So how long have you been locked up?”

“I spent a year in a crazy hospital before I got here.” He paused and chuckled to himself while continuing to speak, “They said I assaulted staff and I needed to come here.”

“Were they giving you a rough time at the hospital?” I asked.

“Not really. It was just that some of them were jerks and liked to push people around.” He paused for a moment staring out the window and then went on, “I think they just wanted to get of me.”

He said this without anger or frustration but as a simple fact. I noticed a vacant look on his face when there should be human emotion. His mind seemed to be distant, probably absorbed in a past event that he could not understand. He did not look like someone afraid of the others. With that background, and by having a mind that seemed to enjoy reflecting on the big issues of life and the world, I sensed that he did not belong in any particular prison clique or gang, and by being physically strong and mentally unpredictable, few people probably harassed him.

“You think when I get out, they’d take me in the Army?” He looked at me trying to see deep into my eyes, making sure I was ready to give an honest answer.

Some of the prison staff had mentioned him to the teachers earlier as one to especially watch out for, that he had trouble trusting authority figures, paranoia they called it, so I was not sure the military would be a smart option for him.

“Well, if you can stay clean for a couple of years, they’d probably give you a chance. They put a lot of money into training people and they don’t want unreliable types.” I sat forward at my desk, looking into his face to see if this made an impact at all, or if he was just talking to pass time.

The other students in the room still seemed relaxed, involved in casual conversations while also working on their assignments. It was a peaceful moment in what had otherwise been a morning of struggle. Usually, as soon as one student gets to work, others will harass him until he gets back off track, this way maintaining their sense of inmate integrity. But this was the last class of the day and perhaps the students, as well as the teachers, were tired and wanted to relax.

“I use to beat up people a lot, but not anymore. Now I got religion.” He gave a little chuckle, turned around and looked at some of his peers. I did not take the comment very seriously, but it did remind me of a conversation I had with a prison chaplain, just before school started. We were sitting together in the cafeteria and I had asked him about how inmates turn their lives around, about how he saw them becoming rehabilitated. He said there were two ways: seven years of psycho-therapy or a religious conversion, which can change behavior in a week.

“When are you turning eighteen?” It had become a stock question often asked at the school, because that was when the student will leave the YOP program and go into the adult population, which is a frightening experience for many.

“In January.”

“You going to go to school in population?”

“I think I’ll get my GED. I’ll never get my credits for graduation.”

“How many you still need?”

“I only have five credits now and I still need fourteen. Man, I’m not into studying this shit that much. I’ll wait ‘til I feel ready and just take the dam GED.”

By looking at me straight in the eye I felt he was being real. He wanted to cut through the crap and just do what was necessary, while at the same time be building hope for his future, if that is even possible in this kind of place.

The high school already set up a separate classroom for students who were turning eighteen and had entered the general prison population. By prison policy, inmates over eighteen were not to mix with the YOP inmates. But prison was such a small, enclosed world, the two groups were communicating and adults knew where to conveniently leave cigarettes for the youths.

“Those dam COs are goin t’ write me up ‘cause I forgot to clean my room this morning! I wish they’d stop tryin to piss me off. I already got two infractions this week and if I get anymore I’m goin t’ lose more goodtime.” He finished by looking blankly at the walls in my room, as though they were also an enemy, while his arms were folded tightly across his chest, becoming as angry as he was frustrated.

I just stood back waiting for his next verbal assault against the system that has locked him away for so many years. Anger and frustration is a daily reality for these youths caged up and forced to deal with authority figures in which they had never learned how to effectively deal. From parents, to teachers, to police, including most

adults, these rebellious youths had difficulty maintaining a reasonable relationship with anyone outside of a homie from the hood. But gang life was just a jump from the frying pan into the fire.

I was just about to ask him to return to his seat and work on his assignment when he looked up to me and asked, “What do you think happens to people when they die.” Was this a ploy to avoid working? I quickly made an intuitive scan of the situation, his face looked sincere, and this is not a student who avoided working, he actually seemed content to work; but as I noticed earlier he did enjoy reflecting on life. So I decided he was being honest.

“In my opinion,” I paused a little to think, to select something that may sound reasonable to a teenager. “I think people have souls that go on encountering life in a different kind of way, in a different kind of world.” I stopped short only wanting to give him something to think about. “Do you have an opinion?” I asked while leaning against a bookcase.

He paused for a minute, looking at the same wall as he did just before, formulating a mental picture. Then he turned, glanced at me and said, “I think there is a heaven and a hell. Sometimes I think this place is like a hell.”

“Life is what you make it.” Great, somehow I had just totally avoided the fact that prison can tear people down psychologically. But what else could I have said?

“They lock us up in here just to punish us. But we only learn from each other, its a college of criminals.” He chuckled and looked back at the other students to see

if anyone was listening to him.

“You got teachers in here now. You think the kids will learn much from the teachers?” This had been a question I felt all the teachers had on their minds.

“Man,” he turned away to walk to his chair and then looked back straight at me, “you guys just as well be on another planet.” Then he sat down.

After the students left for the day I thought about his statement and what it was like for a teacher to be trying to connect with troubled youth, how frustrating it could be trying to reach across the abyss. It was like sending a manned mission to the Moon; even though it was a lot of work, it had to be done. I felt that as adults we had a moral obligation to provide support for our youths, that many of their problems were related to the society that we as adults had inadvertently created; but I also knew that there were limits on everything.

Shortly after the end of the workday a number of the teachers left the education floor together, walking down the stairs and through a concrete corridor to “D” unit, which contains the cells (inmates call them “houses”) of our students. It had a circular design in thick unpainted, metal and glass, with a control booth in the center that operated all doors therein. It was the same place we first were introduced to our students. A small unit office sat off to one side where a guard was sitting doing paperwork and drinking coffee.

Immediately after the booth officer opened the door into the unit for us, a number of loud youthful voices were heard screaming through the thick metal doors and the heavy duty glass walls that held the youths inside their pods. “Ozette sucks!” or

“Fuck you Snyder!” and another hidden youth yelled a more approachable but suspicious, “Mr. Sappho, come here a second.” But we just give weak smiles and mechanical waves.

Stephen, a target of some of the slander, looked over in their direction and sighed sarcastically and waved, saying, “Yeh, I know, I know.”

I could tell he had a long day. Standing there in the few feet between the doorway leading out of the education floor that we had just come from and the door leading outside to the prison courtyard, we could turn and look up at the celled-in youth exposing only an occasional stark profile of their heads behind the small window in each cell door, their muffled voices echoing in the rotunda. With a loud bang the lock on our door suddenly was released electronically by the guard in the duty booth and we walked out into the fresh afternoon air, fully aware that our students could not do the same.

“I don’t know about you guys, but I’m waiting awhile before assigning homework.” I said hoping for a chuckle in return.

“What do you mean? You’re forgetting this is prison. We can tell the guards to make them do their homework.” Stephen replied as though he was half serious, but then continued on sounding a bit whimsical, “heck, we could have them thrown in the hole if they don’t it!”

I said, also half seriously, “But aren’t you afraid of crushing their precious sparkle of enthusiasm. Isn’t education an attempt at lighting a candle in the darkness of mere being?”

I was beginning to enjoy this lively exchange of half-baked satire as we walked up to the key control booth and the metal box promptly swung out

from the concrete wall, waiting for us to drop our key rings into it, which we all hastily did. I was still waiting for the return poke of humor when suddenly a prison guard dashed out of a nearby door, nearly striking me, and kept running across the courtyard. Looking in his direction, I could see three or four other guards from various corners of the prison, all moving quickly down various sidewalks toward a distant courtyard door with a large “B” above it.

“There is a fight in B unit.” A middle age woman prison guard walked toward us; she had been standing inside the same doorway the first guard had scuttled out of.

“It’s the second fight today.” She gave us an exasperated look while holding a cigarette, “Now if they had you teachers over there educating those bums,” she paused to look at each of us and smiled, “it would probably be a whole lot better, yeh?”

“I’d hit them over the head with my history book,” perked up Marge while grabbing her keys from the metal box.

Stephen added, “They’d be too busy doing my homework to fight.”

As a jostling group we headed for the main gate and an evening of freedom.

Chapter 6

The afternoon sunlight was shining brightly on the cabin’s front wall, having pierced through a space in the trees, giving the old, log structure a peaceful and delightful appearance, as I drove up the driveway. Having made all the usual greetings to the dogs and then inside to say hi to the cat, I quickly changed into sweats while planning an hour hike following the Sol Duc River.

As I was kneeling and lacing up my hiking boots next to the outside door,

I decided to tease Suka who was bouncing up and down in anticipation just outside. Her bright blue eyes light up her stark black and white face. Opening the door quickly I looked straight at her and gave out a startling “Hey”. She abruptly stopped her prancing to look directly at me, at which time I closed the door. Again I opened the door, shouted at her, and closed it quickly chuckling to myself, pleased with my deviousness.

I had just resumed tying my boots when suddenly loud “bang”, the door flung open hitting me on the head, knocking me to the floor. There stood blue eyed Suka, in the doorway, giving out a low, reprimanding howl and looking like she was not in a mood for playing any more games. I decided then that she did not have much a sense of humor.

The turbulent, icy waters of the Sul Doc River were a welcomed relief from the trapped stale air of school. I took a deep breath of the fresh air and walked along its alder, maple and Douglas fir filled banks, through the dense growth of trees, seeing the variety of autumn colors exhibited by them. Maple trees had large palm-sized leaves that were twice the size of their nearest competitors. Of all the trees their fall foliage looked the most colorful and interesting. Utilizing the full range of yellows, reds, and gold, the maple leaves went even farther in decorating, showing a multitude of brownish-black, oval shaped patterns.

It is during these tranquil moments of walking that I often sensed a melancholy air springing from the rocky, tumultuous flow of the river. I gradually began to feel the ancient, airy temperament still lodged within its watery banks. The river followed a low winding way through the thickly wooded and hilly landscape. Within its’ turquoise waters there were many small, darting creatures who inhabited the clear waters of glacier

run-off; it was a highway of life for Salmon, Rainbow Trout, and a healthy variety of other creatures who enjoyed sporty lives under the silvery surface of the river. But the river was an enigmatic, misty spirit of earthly passage that seemed to carry the core of a time removed from our ordinary reality; I could sense veiled realities lying far below our everyday level of awareness; ones that slowly, invisibly evolved in their own timeless way.

But evolving for what? Perhaps for a greater sense of completion; it was pursuing an ancient concept of finalization; where every purpose, every being within its' watery creation must find utter and complete collapse, though this will probably never be.

Just as I was returning from the hike and walking past my neighbor's house I heard a yell and turned to see the owner in the doorway of his large, open garage waving at me. Appearing to be in good spirits, while brushing dust from his eyebrows, I did not hesitate to walk up to and meet with him.

"Heard they're planning to do some logging." He said leaning against a workbench that was covered with various tools and pointed in the direction from which I had just returned, having finished my afternoon walk.

"They suppose to be using helicopters to fly the cut logs off the mountainside. Suppose to take out five units, whatever that means." He turned and offered me a beer from a small cooler on the concrete floor just beneath the workbench, which I promptly took, being thirsty from the hike.

We then sat down on metal chairs next to an old woodstove in what looked like a workshop in his garage, and talked more about the possible logging operation. He would

look deep in my eyes for indications of what my gut reaction was to the situation, wanting to know my opinion. Perhaps he was just looking for a laugh.

Being such a stoic person I refused to lend any emotion to the occasion. But it did bother me that logging was to occur soon after having moved into such an unspoiled environment. I had barely gotten to know the woods and now some of them were to be cut down.

A quick sparkle lit in his moody eyes when he decided to change the topic. “Say, I just heard a good story on the radio this morning. I think you would like it. OK if I tell it?” He seemed genuinely enthused about doing so, and I agreed thinking anything would be better than discussing the local logging issue.

The neighbor went back to his cooler and grabbed each of us another beer and then sat down as before, near the woodstove. He wiped his mouth and then rubbed his mustache quickly before beginning the tale.

“A man called Ted Smith had arrived on the west coast of the Olympic Peninsula about seventy years ago and had put many years into logging, raising a family and learning how to play his fiddle. But now his body was slowly giving out from working long days in the forest and he wanted a more leisurely lifestyle. So he began hiring himself out to festive occasions where he would play the fiddle, earn some cash, and perhaps forget the rugged logging life.”

The neighbor gulped down and finished his beer first beer and reached over to the work bench and grabbed another one and light a cigarette. Then he continued his story, “Late in the spring of that year he got a chance to play music for a wedding reception at the Mora School, which in those days sat on the Hoh River. He had recently built a cabin

farther inland and knew it would be about a three hour walk to get there, but it would be nice to get the cash and perhaps farther gain public recognition that he was starting a new line of work.”

I could see by his demeanor that he loved telling stories and was glad to have me around for an audience. With a leg crossed over and wearing an ancient pair of hunting boots he continued, “A beautiful bride and groom graced the occasion and Ted played all of his favorite tunes like a possessed banshee, delighting the small crowd. At around midnight he finally stopped to give the folk time to make it back to their homes, while they still had some energy. In those days many people had long distances to walk. Besides possibly getting lost, many feared the wild creatures that stalked the night.”

The neighbor paused a minute to caress one of his dogs that had walked in to greet us, afterwards shooing away the animal, and then he continued on, “Ted packed up his fiddle, received his payment for the night and started on what should have been a nine mile walk back to his cabin. It was a cool fall night so he threw on the extra sweater that was packed away in a small bundle and he headed briskly up the wooded trail that lead to his home. Even at night the ancient forest contained many sounds of animals big and small. The dim moonlight barely etched out the trail for his aging eyes, but he traveled at a pace younger men would admire.”

He stood up to stretch, and began pacing back and forth in his garage at this point as though to emphasis an important part of the story, while I had finished one beer and reached over to the work bench to grab another one.

The neighbor sat back down and continued, “He was about three quarters of the way home when the sound of a large branch breaking gave him a sudden fright. He

stopped to turn around and saw one of the biggest wolves he had ever seen. It had been tracking him for some distance and now it looked like it was ready to attack. Their eyes met and studied

each other intently. Without a weapon there was little he could do for self defense. The wolf advanced ever so slowly, his eyes staring deeply into Ted's, as though it was reading his soul. Feeling no means of escape he began to walk backwards in a deep panic, until he stumbled over a tree root and landed hard on the cold, wet ground. His fiddle flew into the branches, striking the strings in a way that it gave out musical sounds." He waved his arms in a circle through the air above his head as though to illustrate the sounds made in the story. Then he said, "At this the wolf stopped, its ears shot up like tiny spears and he stared at the fiddle still hanging loose in the tree."

"Dang, you'd think that wolf never heard a fiddle before," I said.

The neighbor chuckled, crossed over the other leg and when on, "Ted could see that the sounds from the fiddle had distracted the wolf's attack and perhaps, he thought, it could also serve to prevent it altogether. So he quickly picked up the instrument and started to play a song."

Deciding to stand back up again, the neighbor swung one of his hands hard back and forth pretending to strum a fiddle. "The wolf sat back on its rear, pointed his nose at the pale moon and howled long and sweetly. It actually looked as though it was entertained by the music. The more Ted played the more the eyes of the large wolf started to dance in amusement. It continued to howl and soon another wolf appeared from the shadows of the forest, and then another and another. Soon about a dozen wolves had gathered in a circle around Ted. Once they had formed a sufficient size of crowd

they started to dance with each other. Well, thought Ted, this is much the same as what happened at the school earlier this evening. Instead of playing the fiddle for young folk, I am out here in the woods playing for wolves! Soon the shock of seeing dancing wolves wore off and Ted actually began to relax and enjoy himself. His body twisted and turned, dancing to the music like a old tree in a windstorm. He went on and on playing music better than he ever had before. It was as though a secret part of his soul had opened up, telling him how to do it. The wolves continued their spirited dance until the rosy rays of dawn appeared through the forest leaves. Then they slowly crawled backed to their earthly homes. Seeing that he had been abandoned he once again picked up his small bundle and continued home.”

At this point he walked over and picked up a log from a nearby woodpile, threw it into the woodstove, returned to his chair, paused a minute while crossing his legs and taking a drink of beer. Then he began the conclusion of his story. “After that startling and mysterious event people never saw much of Ted Smith. To many people’s dismay he stopped playing the fiddle in public. The strange thing to his family was that he had started to disappear at night, and no one seemed to know where he went. Before, people passing by at night would see a living room light indoors, but not anymore.”

Smiling with the hint of a repressed chuckled he concluded, “At about this same time people wandering through the woods late at night began to report hearing, ever so distantly, wild and intoxicating music. No one could make any sense from these strange tales, and usually the stories would be discounted. Some thought it was the ocean winds or other creatural sounds. Perhaps it was Ted Smith and this could be the origin of the phrase ‘Dances with Wolves’.” He gave a hearty laugh at

the story's ending and I chuckled also, enjoying the beer and his telling of it.

Then there was a more somber look on his face that confused me, as though he had a purpose in telling the story that I did not recognize. It was a look that I would remember for the next couple of days, trying to decipher it. Even though I never mentioned it, he knew how I felt about staying in the woods. Maybe by telling the story, it was his way of laughing at me.

After thanking him for the beer I said goodbye and returned to the cabin, where the dogs had earlier found their favorite resting places and were patiently waiting for me. Since it was nearing supper time I went inside and I began fixing a bowl of cereal with powder milk, honey, trail mix, and a banana.

Later that evening I opened a draw in the kitchen cabinet and I saw and felt total revulsion. A nest of baby mice made from shredded paper with the mother sitting on top had been built and currently in residence in the draw, next to the roll of tape and a bottle of glue. Feeling angry and distraught, I pulled out the draw and laid it on the kitchen floor, yelling at Kitty who was sitting nearby. "Kitty, do your job, kill the mice!" I yelled at her. She looked at me in a worried manner, turned and ran off. By this time the cluster of mice had jumped out of the draw and disappeared through the cracks in the kitchen walls, leaving me to clean up their rancid mess. It was a significant moment in my life at the cabin, one that I will not forget, because that was when I decided to officially declare war on mice.

Following my ordeal with bone cancer I had grown thoughtful about the taking of life, even from the little creatures. But in this case I quickly made an exception. They had not only invaded my territory, but the disease that they were capable of carrying frightened me. At night I could sometimes hear them scurrying up a wall, or across a distant floor. Dog food pellets had been found in the strangest of places, like inside an old pair of socks, and it took awhile to understand that mice had delivered and left it there. The TV remote had the rewind button chewed off, a wax duck was found half devoured, along with various papers and magazines. One evening as I sat at the kitchen table searching the Internet, I could hear Suka jumping just outside the door. Suddenly a small furry mouse ran in from outside, beneath the door into the kitchen, passing under the chair I was sitting in, quickly crossed the living room and disappeared into a distant wall.

Another evening just before going to bed, I found kitty playing with a live mouse. I tried to explain to her not to be playing with them, but to kill them; never finding a dead mouse later, I do not think she understood.

These incidences drove home the point that I needed to take drastic action if I was not to be flooded with rodents. Even though I hated the thought of killing, it was kill or be killed, a law of the wild.

Just after I had finished watching another old western video, and let the dogs back out for the night, the phone rang. I was getting ready for bed and still pondering about the mice menace. It was my wife and she sounded bored and lonely, as though she just wanted to talk. "Your Dad is so funny sometimes. This evening I was asking him if he was happy staying here or would rather go into a nursing home. He said he would rather

die than go into a nursing home. He really means it; that's why he was always getting angry, fighting with the nurses, whenever your brothers put him into one. He is happy here and I'm glad for him. He is easy to take care of. I hope he lives for a long time."

"That's good." I said. "I think some of those people in nursing homes give up on life and die off fast. Dad needs something to wake up in the morning for."

"On the monitor I can hear him talking to your mother when they are in bed at night. He was saying, "Who's this cute chick around here." He doesn't remember who I am, that I am your wife." She chuckled a little.

"Well, since I'm home only about five days every month it may take awhile for them to understand that." I replied.

"You're not going to start seeing another woman are you?" She spoke pointedly, and I could feel her concern.

"No I am not. God, there's hardly any women out here." I knew it would be hopeless to completely soothe her suspicions. She was just going to have to trust me.

"Then what are you doing in the evenings?"

"I told you before; I come home, go hiking, read and write for awhile, watch a video and then go to bed." I paused for a minute to see if she was settling down and then went on. "Ok, the forest is my mistress; it is deep, dark, and mysterious like a woman. I love to go hiking and living in the woods. You know that. Plus, the forest helps me find inspiration for my writing. Not many women can do that." I felt this was a pretty good argument; I was re-emphasizing facts already known.

"Well, I remember hearing you saying one time that you thought you had

lived an earlier life as a monk.”

“I was just saying it as a possibility; I don’t have a real belief in reincarnation. There are a lot of things that people will never understand in life, like Bigfoot, so I only say it was possible.” Finally I felt we were back on track, understanding and trusting each other.

“I know I have my faults like complaining about things too much, but you aren’t much of a family man. You just run off whenever there are problems.” She was returning to the same argument that we had countless times. Fortunately, I agreed with much of what she said and we ended the discussion in a safe and sane way.

Part of me missed my parents and being with my wife, but there was something inside of me preventing a strong need to belong to family and community. I never had a desire for children. This craziness inside of me had a way of devouring my desire to feel connected to others. A sense of aloneness, especially within nature, had always been an important part of my life. I would always remember as a young teenager walking out into the distant countryside of North Dakota, just to lie in the tall grass of an open prairie and watch the windy clouds roll past, looking like the bundled shapes of a long departed herd of bison.

Chapter 8

Nearly a month had gone by and I received into one of my morning classes a student called Lieu, or “Turtle” was his prison nickname, who became interested during the last couple of days in just sitting and staring coldly at me during the entire class. He was doing a minimal amount of work when he first arrived and I was hoping that he

would become bored with the staring act and get back to work. I felt that this insolent routine was only a ploy to unnerve and distract me while trying to teach. He was an overweight Asian with greased-back hair, an out-of-control acne problem, talked and looked as though he had grown up in the street gangs, probably rarely went to school after fourteen or fifteen years of age. Like many of the youths, I could tell his parents did not really exist because the only authority he appeared to understand was street-style threats and other means of intimidation.

We had just seen the movie about street kids in the sixties called, “The Outsiders” and were in the middle of a discussion about it when I asked, “Lieu, can you tell me why the title of the video was called ‘The Outsiders’? What does it mean to you, as far as the story is concerned?” I was hoping to engage him in a discussion; maybe it’ll click and he will find it meaningful or worthwhile.

You gave me an unconcerned look, grinned at a friend sitting nearby, and said nothing while slowly slipping more deeply into his seat.

“Lieu, you must have an opinion on why the film was called, ‘The Outsiders’? How do you think these kids were living? Did they have families? Did they talk about going to school? What were they doing with their lives?” I was drawing this kid a picture but seriously doubted he would even look at it. He groaned slightly and leaned back in his chair, giving me a look as cold as last week’s sandwich meat.

I crossed my arms over my chest and firmly said, “We have a rule here that says students are to participate in school. That means students come to class, cooperate with the teacher, and do their assigned work. Do you understand it?” A spark had just lit an angry fire inside of me and he knew it. I felt frustration was eating away and it was

time for me to act on his deliberate disobedience.

Sharply sitting up now he said, "I'm not doin anything! I just don't know what ta say. You can't kick me out for not knowin." He was pleading his case, but I was not going for it, because he had been in class for a couple of days without doing any work.

"You're just not trying, that's the problem." I was still struggling to get through to him.

"Cause I don't like this stuff. You need to be teaching us something more interestin. Man, you just don't know how to teach, dat's what I think. They found you on the street somewhere when you got this job." A couple of peers laughed.

"You got a teaching certificate? I want to see it." A student who was normally quiet perked up and started into it also, causing a few more students to laugh.

"Lieu, you need to go. I'm not taking this." I backed away toward my desk (so I could be close to the telephone if needed) to see if he would get up and leave.

"Man, you're ain't shit. Ya ain't even a real teacher. You like writin people up. I didn't do nothing. You can't write up people for doin nothing."

"Are you going to leave or not." I moved closer to the telephone.

There was more profanity, anger, and righteous indignation than I had heard for sometime, but he left to go back to his cell (or house). The other students sat in amusement, made statements for his defense, asked if I enjoyed writing up inmates, but then they indignantly went back to the previous discussion, though still not taking it very seriously.

It was during lunch break and I was correcting papers alone in my classroom when the principal approached me saying that we needed to talk. Any “talk” with the administrator was not seen as a good thing. I had often wondered they did not invite teachers into their offices, close the door, and tell them what a good job they were doing.

He had a small office painted beige, without any pictures or decorations, only a loaded bookcase, filing cabinet, and a computer monitor on his desk.

“Kids are telling me you’re too rough on them.” He said after closing the door and I had sat in the only other chair in his room. There was an intensely serious if not glum look on his face.

“I’ve got kids in my classroom refusing to do any work.”

“What kind of options are you giving them? Remember these kids have not been in school much and need to learn how to adjust to our classrooms.”

“As long as they are doing something constructive, using their time wisely, I will leave them alone. But if they insist on not doing anything, wanting to argue and stir up the others, then they are not programming and according to prison policy I need to remove them.” I said it all in one breath, feeling totally exasperated because I was only acting according to the rules of the school: if students do not work, remove them.

The principal looked down at some papers containing notes on his desk and then said, “Well, you need to lighten up. You’re not motivating these kids, and being a good motivator is an important part of your job. I know we have a tough bunch of kids,

but you need to try to avoid needless confrontations.” He paused for a moment and then said, “and to change the subject here, Chris at the district office says we really need to guard ourselves because lawyers are going to be watching us like a pack of hungry wolves, especially the special education stuff. Being the special education teacher you need to be serving those kids and making sure all the documentation is done, and carried out correctly.” He paused again, swung around in his chair to face his desk and began to shuffle through various stacks of paper apparently looking for something. I tried to cross my legs but stopped seeing that if I did so I could accidentally kick him, being the room so small and having him sitting directly in front of me.

After finding his document he turned back to face me saying, “I’m going to re-assign your class schedule so you can focus on only the special education kids we have now. Take a look at this list of kids and you can tell me later if you know of any students that should be included. You should be getting more of them as we get new kids in. Also, make sure you coordinate with the other teachers. Some of them say you’re not talking to them about who’s special ed.” At this time he seemed to relax, lean back in his chair, and waited for my comments. I seemed to catch a glint in his eye that must of been similar to a spider’s look whenever a fly would get caught in it’s web.

Feeling he would listen to me in a fair manner, I began, “You said yourself that special education was never meant for this kind of place, and all these kids could qualify as special ed, if you really looked at it. A lot of the smart kids are more dangerous than the dumb ones. It’s different in regular schools. They’ve got a lot of normal kids to better judge who has a disorder. But we don’t get many normal kids in prison, and to try to judge these kids would be like judging people on the dark

side of the moon. I am not sure you could even get a valid assessment in this environment.” It came blurring out of me; I was not really thinking about what I was saying. The small room seemed to be swallowing me, I was feeling cramped, persecuted and confused and I started to babble on mindlessly.

“Well, I understand that this is something new for all of us. Time will tell on many of these issues. But you know how I feel about showing respect in the classroom.” He looked straight at me to re-enforce this point.

I paused a minute to collect myself. Great, I thought, how are we to get kids to work, set our expectations, keep them in line, without the use of disciplinary actions? I knew he wanted us to build relationships, but these kids could only see and understand exploitation.

I said, “I know what you mean. Sometimes the best way to get what one wants is an indirect one. I’ll work on it. But what if they get thrown in the hole, you know IMU? A lot of these special ed. kids end in up in solitary because they lack social skills. They don’t get along well with peers or staff.” I had seen a pattern developing of special education youths being put in solitary confinement, but felt helpless dealing with a prison system that had to isolate problem inmates in order to maintain security.

“I don’t know if anything can be done in IMU. Maybe you can drop off schoolwork for your special ed kids and ask if they need help. I can call the Assistant Superintendent to find out.”

The principal had a laid back approach toward being captain of the ship, but he could still bite if he wanted to. The school district had conned him out of retirement for the job. In an earlier life he was a principal of a large high school near

Olympia, Washington. But this job was far different from being at regular high schools and he knew it. It was something that would take time just to see how it all develops, to see how the parts of the pie will fit together.

Feeling more relaxed, leaning completely back in my chair, and carefully crossing my legs I said, “I’m still having a problem figuring out what to be doing here. It seems all the expectations are on getting these kids to buckle down, do the work, stop complaining, and become model students. But they have so much anger. They resent adult authority and refuse to conform to our standards. I want to be a good teacher, firm but fair, but I keep wondering if I’m missing something. I want to build those relationships, but what many of them seem to need is a better understanding of what life is all about, and how to become someone who has some meaning, some value. Education does not seem to help them in this regard. They can’t see what is in it for them. While I struggle to be teaching the basic academics, they seem to be hungry for lessons on life that don’t deeply hurt, and I’m not sure how to teach that.”

“Well,” he looked down thinking for a moment in a thoughtful pause, “you can always experiment with what you think is appropriate.”

Sensing that he may not have clearly understood me, I paused to organize my thoughts as carefully as possible, and continued, “I want my classroom to be as much of a community as possible, so they can learn how to live in one when they get out. That means self-direction and respect for others, which can be difficult for them at this stage.” I went on thinking out loud. “But the best education is one that teaches kids how to become the most they can be, to recognize their hidden potential, right?” The principal only nodded, waiting to see where I was going with this remark.

I continued, “If I could combine my reading and writing assignments with studies that probe into the deeper, more meaningful issues like social and family conflicts, questions concerning their lives, the idea of freedom, and what it means to grow up, you know, I could give them a curricula that is as meaningfully integrated as possible. This way I can work with them on different levels. If they can not accept me as a teacher then perhaps I can still work with them as a mentor, almost like a big brother.” I looked suspiciously in his eyes for a response.

“You’re the professional. Just keep them learning, keep them moving to the west as the cowboys would say. How you do it is up to you.” His face seemed to lighten up and we said our good byes.

It was still the teacher’s planning time as I left the Principal’s office and walked down the hallway and saw a couple of teachers who had gathered in an empty classroom to eat lunch and watch a TV news channel, which was in front of the room hooked up to a cable. It appeared this lunch time informal assembly of teachers had become a daily routine, giving us a chance to eat lunch, relax, blow steam, and talk about the day.

“I haven’t heard much of anything. Have you?” The voice of Stephen bounced off walls like the small steel ball in a pinball machine. Not knowing what the topic under discussion was I walked into the cozy cluster of teachers.

“I mean the Sergeant talked to us about this riot that some of the kids were thinking about doing, that they were planning some “drama”, as it was called, and for sometime now, nothing has happened. Shouldn’t we be informed on what is going on here? It mean it would be nice to know if

the threat is over of not.” continued Stephen, while sitting in a student desk and spooning down soup that he had poured out of a thermos bottle into a small cup.

Marge blurted out boldly, sitting in a student desk with her lunch spread out in front of her, holding a bagel in one hand and a carrot in the other, “Remember, this is prison. These guards have their own set of needs. If they think they need to tell us what is or is not going on around here, then they will tell us. Frankly Stephen, in this case, no news is good news.” Marge took another bite from her bagel, munching on it for awhile and then broke the temporary silence in the room. “My god, this guard comes into my room, right in middle of second period, telling me not to let students sleep in class. I mean, he just walked into my room like a riot was going on and told me in front of everyone that I was not to let kids sleep in my class!” speaking and looking deeply offended.

I chirped up, “Tell Frank. He’ll talk to their supervisor and they can settle it between themselves. That kind of stuff will only make us look bad in front of the kids. I liked the guard we had earlier, Anderson, and it looked like the kids liked him too. He didn’t knit-pick. And he’s positive, kind of had a cheery, personal approach. But he knew when to draw the line and was consistent about it. But some of these other guards, I mean, you can tell by the way the kids act if there is a good or a bad one watching through the hallway windows.” I paused for a minute for feedback but the other teachers were busy eating, so I went on. “Imagine being a hyperactive teenager with impulse control problems living under twenty-four hour a day observation of some guard who only knows how to knit-pick at everything you do. It’d drive a kid even more crazy.”

The special education teacher in me suddenly came out. “I remember getting a speeding ticket in Port Angeles, and how angry it made me feel. I mean I really thought the cop was arrogant and petty. So what if I was just a little over the speed limit, a warning would have been sufficient; but at least I did not have to live with the guy. Not the way these kids live with guards around constantly.”

“The guards only care about punishment. And they think we’re nuts for coming in here to educate them.” Ozette had calmed down and became reflective.

“I think the best way we can educate them is by showing them the kind of people we are.” The bleeding heart inside of me came out inadvertently. “By being a role model and giving them a chance to see and understand how people feel and act in life.” I had been thinking about how to best teach ever since my meeting with the principal.

“Adams is such a liberal. All they’re interested in is what they can get out of you. You start playing rescuer with these kids and they’ll manipulate you until you get fired. I wouldn’t try it. They’re criminal history is just too long.” Snyder had just walked in looking like he needed some entertainment and wanted to join in on the conversation.

“You can’t generalize,” Ozette responded. “What about Ridgeway. His sister got raped. So he went out, beat the guy up, nearly killed him, and they gave him a long sentence in adult prison. But everyone likes him, even the COs. I wouldn’t call him a hardened criminal. Besides, these kids are still young. There may be hope for some of them. I wouldn’t turn out the light yet.” She said swallowing the last of her cream cheese bagel and wiping her mouth with a napkin. Even among these hardest of teenage criminals, the mother in her still burned bright. I was amazed by a woman who was born

to nurture youthful minds and to teach.

Ted suddenly feeling a bit of inspiration spoke up, “Need I remind you that the state of Washington has mandated what every teacher is expected to be teaching and all students to be learning if they want a high school diploma. These “Essential Learnings” are a big part of your annual evaluation.”

Poor Ted I thought. He was a man with no imagination and much less intestinal fortitude.

“But just stop and think about it.” I was ready for this argument and jumped at the chance. “Anywhere in those documents do they talk about teaching our youths how to live a healthy life building good relationships? Again and again I’ve read about how we are to be teaching them to become good employees. But what about the need for them to become well adjusted human beings? Shouldn’t that also be important? What about teaching them to be the future care-takers of their families and communities? To not grow up and economically exploit and pollute their own communities, leaving behind a little that is useful or meaningful for the future lives of their own children.” The blood was being to rise in me. “God, you should see how kids now days are growing up and compare that with the environments we enjoyed as children!” I was getting hot under the collar, feeling like I was exposing myself too much, but decided to go on. “A lot of these kids are afraid of getting shot just walking down the block! The problem is that we are not teaching them that success is more than just a high paying job or beating their competition; but rather it is being a genuine member in a community of elders who are passing on a healthy heritage to their people. It has the feeling of moving from the entrapped solar system of adolescence to the open universe of adulthood. They need to

learn that good relationships are all important. But unfortunately, I'm afraid that that this is something our schools have forgotten, or don't think is important; and our society is falling apart because of it."

"You're a big one to talk. You don't even live with your wife." Said Stephen.

"Yeh, but we still feel that the marriage is well. And I'm doing what I can do best alone, which is to study my relationship with the natural world and write about it. I mean, when I die I'm going to be buried in the earth, and my spirit is certain to follow; so I better be trying to understand the place." I said the latter remark with a sarcastic smirk, in an attempt to de-escalate the heated discussion, wanting to get back to the usual good-natured bantering previously spoken.

Stephen looked at me, grinning like a drunken thief. I knew that he could see through my thinly veiled disguise, that I had unintentionally revealed a secret part of my inner being.

At this point Marge packed up her now finished meal, licked off her fingers and left the room. Ted also got up and said something about doing more copy work and left hurriedly.

Only I and Stephen were left in the room and we sat there quietly for awhile. Deciding to keep the conversation going I spoke, "Stephen, do you believe that dreams contain messages of sorts? I mean, that they can be symbolic in some ways?" I had remembered him saying that he studied Carl Jung while in college.

Stephen looked at me as though I had caught him by surprise on a new subject, thought for a minute and while eating a sandwich he said, "Yeh, I think dreams have certain kinds of truth in them. Of course it is hard to interpret them, but it is

possible.” He looked at me expecting in a curious manner.

I went on, “Well, I’ve always thought it strange, looking back to when I moved into my cabin, that practically every night during that first week I had dreams about being attacked by either a wild witch-like woman or a group of them. It was like they were crawling out of the woods and trying to rape me. They weren’t scary dreams but just startling. It was the same kind of dream that repeated itself for nearly a week. I tend to remember my dreams and I never had one repeat itself so much.”

Stephen said, “It was probably one of those wish fulfillment dreams guys have.” He gave a slight chuckle. Then he went on, “Boy, I never had a dream like that. It sounds great. What was it like?” He was leaning back in his chair, expecting a length description.

“I can only remember walking somewhere by myself and then being practically pounced upon by a group of women who all had long hair and looked a bit ragged. Then before I knew what is going on they begin to attack me sexually, but I tried desperately to fight them off. Suddenly they stopped and changed into birds and flew into a group of tall, distant trees. That was when I woke up.”

“You said you had this same dream how many nights?” said Stephen.

”I can remember about four or five times in a row.”

He went on with a slight smile, “I know this is personal, but were any of these affairs consummated?”

I suddenly felt humiliated. “Come on Stephen, you have to take everything as a joke? I am being serious.” I paused for a minute and then went on, “Looking back at that time in my life, I think the wild women in the dream represented the wilderness I

had just moved into. I mean, I was surrounded by a hundred miles of nothing but forest and subconsciously, I was feeling threatened by all that open and uncontrolled space. I'm just

not sure where the sexual part comes into it," paused for a moment not sure of what I would say. "Unless, the fact that I love walking through the woods and see it as being like a woman."

Stephen spoke abruptly, "Sailors think of the sea as being like a woman, so why not the forest?" He sat back up straight in his chair saying, "Birds usually represent the idea of a spirit. But anything that is wild and unpredictable has to be a woman symbol. Masculine symbols tend to be rigid and controlled like big trees, huge rocks and mountains."

I saw Stephen giving his sandwich a thoughtful look and then I went on, "You know, now that I think about it, this store clerk mentioned to me about that same time some people believed that a group of women practicing witchcraft lived in the area. Maybe that had something to do with it too."

Stephen broke in, "Well if you don't come to work and didn't call, I'm going to take it that the witches got you, and you should be rescued whether you want it or not." He gave out a laugh.

Feeling that the subject had been depleted I decided to get back to my work. So I stood up and said a goodbye to Stephen. It was nice to have someone at work you could confide in I thought.

Still remembering the discussion between Ted and Marge and myself, I was halfway down the hallway when it slowly dawned on me. It was the strangest of feelings,

but I suddenly felt that if I was going to be successful teaching at the school I was going to have to learn how to do it my own way, for better or worse, radical or not. My classroom was mine and everything inside of there depended on me alone.

It was a week later and I had just stopped walking momentarily on an old logging road to turn around and inspect the range of misty mountains that loomed above the encircling rain forest. Dark clouds had blanketed their upper most domains, leaving only the steeply sloping, lower lands visible. The endless marching of clouds could be seen brushing up coldly against the immortal mountains. They looked like batches of steel wool stretched out and hanging in various loose clumps. The air had the feel of a damp wash cloth. The whole landscape contained the dim, gray light of dusk, even though it was only four in the afternoon.

Turning and walking forward once again, I noticed Orion excitedly chasing back and forth, running through the middle of a stream that was still choked and hard charging with the drainage of an earlier rainfall. It was a stream that ran perpendicular to the road that I was walking on, flowing through a large culvert and then continued shortly to fall into the swollen Sol Duc River. It was obvious seeing Orion that he had detected prey. Dancing about in the cold waters reaching up to his tummy, hurling his body over and under the dense branches that consistently crossed over the creek, he glowed with the possibility of prey.

A spark of curiosity touched me; seeing the beauty of the natural landscape in which he found such promise, I wondered if the animal he sought, like the ancient cave

hunters, was to him nothing more than a wandering spirit of nature; and that death was nothing more than a movement of the soul.

I also saw Suka was circling on the banks of the small stream, as though waiting for a meal.

Suddenly hearing intense splashing, I walked quickly to check on Orion's progress and saw that he was using his forepaws to wrestle with a large, twisting salmon in the water. It was as though he was trying to get his paws underneath the fish to raise it up out of the stream. Suddenly he bit down hard on the backside of the squirming creature, making the sound of breaking bones. With the large, flopping fish fairly well balanced in his mouth he proceeded to walk out of the stream, up the grassy embankment, and cautiously laid it down on the grassy shoulder of the road.

It was a beautiful fish. About two feet long, perhaps five pounds in weight, it had the typical Steelhead salmon hooked snout and gray backing that changed to a speckled red on its' flanks. Its' mouth was still sucking desperately for breathe, while Suka quickly nosed up to the flopping fish for a close look. But neither dog showed any signs of wanting to eat it. Even I, who love salmon, did not want to hand carry it back to the cabin, especially barehanded, and cut it up. It was easier to buy in the store. After a minute of smelling and observing the strange creature Orion returned to the stream hoping to capture another prize. Suka moved on also, curious to see what she could find, but with had no real intent of hunting for fish.

Having pity on such a stranded soul, I bent down and lifted it up with both hands stretched out beneath it, hoping it would not squirm loose from my precarious

hold. A layer of slime could be felt between the palms of my hands and the limp body of the creature. With even the slightest of movements it would slip, dropping back to the hard ground. Who knows, I thought, perhaps after a few minutes back in the stream it will return to life. But I could not see leaving it to die on the shoulder of the road; not when it was born for, lived and loved the god given waters. I did not want it suffering the grisly and haunting death of a fish out of water. So with a loud "splat" the slippery salmon smacked the streams surface as I threw it back, watching it sink quickly to the bottom of the cold mountain stream.

Whether it lived or died was know a matter to be decided between itself and natures spirits. Slowly swimming movements began undulated across the damaged body and then I saw it starting down the stream and disappearing from sight. Salmon return to this area to spawn and then die. This one had an added adventure to its journey.

I shouted a "go back" to the dogs and turned around on the old gravelly logging road to return to my cabin and begin my evening meal. Suka, with her bright red tongue hanging out, followed closely behind. Orion was somewhere in the woods, still in the heat of hunting, so he would return later. I decided to not rescue and return anymore of the stranded souls that he was to hunt down and abandon in the grass. Like the stream, let nature take its' course.

Chapter 9

It was on a morning close to the end of November, as I was rolling over in bed, under three layers of blankets, and slowly opening my eyes. I saw from the bright red numbers glowing in the dark: it was five in the morning. A strange noise had awoken me; it was the sound of water splashing furiously from the bathroom. The only object

holding enough water to make that kind of splashing was in the toilet. Had my cat fallen in accidentally? No, she would be crying out for help. Feeling a need to investigate, I threw off the heavy blankets and crawled out of the bed.

The night air was crisp and cool in the log cabin and only a single small night light glowed in the living room, giving me guidance to the bathroom.

Once there I had to reach through the black space searching for the light switch and then struck it quickly. Looking down into the toilet below me, struggling to find a way to leap out, was a large hairy rat, nearly the size of a cat. Fortunately the seat was down, blocking its ability to pull itself up and over the porcelain rim.

Giving up any attempt at removing the varmint I flushed the toilet hoping it would drain out with the flowing water, but it clung to the sides of the bowl and stayed put. At this point I simply closed the remaining lid, turned out the light, and crawled back to bed, where I continued to hear the watery thrash of its' struggle for survival. This last for about 10 minutes until the splashing slowed down and then finally total silence returned to the darkened cabin.

Even though it was seen as one of the most abhorrent creatures on (or in the) earth, I felt saddened by its' untimely death. Perhaps I felt some responsibility in it. But I could not and would not share my home with creatures that crawl like snakes out of the darkness of the night and do as they will through out my private quarters.

I waited one hour to again pull myself out of bed. I had hoped to recover a little sleep, but I did not remember doing so. Turning on the bathroom light and lifting up the toilet lid, I saw the slumped body of the brown hairy rat curled half submerged in the water. Knowing that I needed to remove it, I decided to find a small shovel-like device

with which to scoop it up. Grabbing a large spatula in a kitchen cabinet draw, I returned to the toilet, scooped it out and unceremoniously dumped the body in the kitchen garbage.

Needless to say, from that day forward, I thought twice and looked once before sitting down to relieve myself. Remembering the saber-length claws and rapier front teeth on that rat was enough to motivate me to try to invent a new approach toward waste disposal. One colleague at school suggested a two tier system, a seat above the seat approach, or possibly an extended funnel network. But when I called to enlist the help of a plumber the following day he all he could think of was for me to carry a pistol whenever I heard nature calling.

So I had to come to grips with the futility of trying to stop the dark invasion of creatures popping up from the depths of the earth. It was in the nature of things, like bad dreams that can not be repressed that rodents will forever haunt life in rural cabins; but I would still continue the dreary struggle for a healthy balance between good with evil.

The mornings in early December were much more crisp and frosty than they were earlier in the fall. I left the cabin and walked down the driveway to my truck in the dark, knowing that the sun would be rising late for the next few of months. Looking up I saw the constellation Orion, with his companion dog Sirius, peering down from far above the tall trees still slumbering in the surrounding forest. Being a nightly hunter among the swirling stars, I always felt awed by his heroic presence in the heavens. What a grand personage to be watching so distantly, so serenely, seeing me off to my earthly errands. I had adapted well to the silent, non-radio drives. The truck had become a place to focus

my energies on what was important in my life, without the nuisance of worldly distractions being beamed and broadcasted into my truck. I was beginning to understand the deeper implications evolved in living a reflective and somewhat solitary life. I was beginning to understand the importance of daily periods of silence, so one could better focus on and develop inner peace.

It took thirty minutes to drive the twenty some miles to work, watching a full moon rise on the western horizon. Little had changed among the students during the first few months of school. Many of them remained boldly rebellious, while the teachers maneuvered through the passing weeks striking out with various strategies to hold their classes together, like captains on a life-raft that was voyaging across dark, stormy seas. A few favored more than occasional movies related (or not) to their subject areas, while others would only tackle the students one at a time, as though tutoring rather than teaching. Other teachers felt that if students refused to work, so be it, they would not get any credit. One teacher took the bold formal approach of lecturing to his class, confronting students on their misbehavior, and wrote infractions daily. Of course, this hurt his chances at building any relationships, as though these students were interested in being connected with teacher and running the risk of being labeled as a “traitor” or a “snitch” from peers. It was still a situation full of contradictions, much like life itself, I felt.

“So you’re saying that you like to meditate while driving,” said Ted. I had just walked into his classroom sat down in a student desk. He was alone eating an orange that he had pulled out from a paper bag and sitting behind his desk which was buried in

student paperwork. He looked liked he would not mind some company. He spoke to me in an unexpectedly brash and pointed manner and I was not sure how to respond.

Remembering that he was referring to something I had said earlier in the morning about my silent drives I replied, “I’m only saying that I like to cleanse my mind while driving, and only focus on the physical presence of my body, the truck, and of course, the road. I try to leave everything else in my mind blank. Try it. It is very relaxing.” I had gotten to know the other teachers well enough to feel secure in this off-the-wall conversation; perhaps Ted would find the dry humor entertaining. I continued, “I just think that we need to keep a sane perspective in life.”

“But you’re doing this at 60 miles an hour; now think about this Cole. That’s sane?” Ted barked, sounding like he was indignant over the mere suggestion of my act being a sane one.

I suddenly felt that the good-natured humor had left the discussion. I was willing to talk about certain topics only if they don’t become deeply personal and serious and threaten working relationships.

“Ted, I’m only saying that I want to become as fully present in my life as possible.” I felt the words slipping inadvertently from my mouth. This was one man I felt would never understand the importance of developing a sense of awareness. To him life was just a piece of machinery, like a car that one could manipulate at will while cruising through a carnival-like world of varied delights.

At that point I looked up at the clock in the room and saw that it was slightly past the time the students usually arrive for their morning classes.

“Well, the little darlings should be here by now.” I said. “Maybe I’ll

call downstairs to see if they are going to be late.” I abruptly swung my body out of the small desk and left the room using the need to call as an excuse. I really did not care if the kids were late.

After walking a couple of doors down the hallway and into my own classroom and grabbing the phone, I called the officer who worked in the central booth, in “D” unit. Being the one who would open the cell doors to let the kids up stairs, he would know what was going on.

“Perry here.” He spoke roughly, knowing that polite pretense was not a job requirement in prison.

“Hey, this is Cole. When are the kids coming up for school?”

“Probably not for awhile. They had a big fight this morning at breakfast.”

Trying to act seriously indignant over this news I said, “At breakfast! Why that was about an hour ago. Why weren’t we told about it. We have been working like crazy to get ready for classes this morning.”

With the same coarseness of voice as before he replied, “Sure, just tell your boss to talk to my boss.”

Feeling this to be a newsworthy event, I probed for what information I could get out of him. “Well, what happened? Who hit who?”

Perry explained it in a flat, monotone voice that showed no real concern over the latest event. It sounded like the Hispanics decided to flex some muscle upon the whites who had not joined in with the white gang, who could have provided them with protection. These were the characters, perhaps around eight of them, who were generally well behaved, simply wanted to do their own time, and be left alone by all others.

Unfortunately, this also was the group in which the child-molesters hung out, bringing the resentment of nearly all the other inmates upon them.

I returned to a small group of teachers that were conversing in a classroom and I started explaining everything that had been told to me by Perry. “They were in the middle of breakfast when the Hispanics jumped out of their seats and ran over to the whites and started pounding on whoever they could.” “Olson did not even care. He just grabbed his meal, stood next to the wall, continued to eat and watched the drama. Smith did some punching back, but the others got clobbered too much by too many to do much to defend themselves. I guess no one is seriously hurt. Just some black eyes and swollen lips. But the kids are not coming to school this morning and maybe not this afternoon either. The guards have to do some investigating and they want everyone celled up so they can not be talking to each other, trying to get their own story straight before being questioned by the cops.” I paused to get recollect farther information and then went on, “Sergio, Roberto, De Lino, and Quinn are in the hole because they appear to be the main culprits and they may stay there for awhile. The whites that got beat on are in the hole too, but they should be back to school once the investigation is over with, and their safety can be assured.”

Hearing footsteps from behind me I turned and saw Joyce Cooper. “Where is your boss?” She had walked into the classroom with a frown on her face, looking like she was on a mission. Her heavy set figure and jet black hair gave her a forbidding appearance. Being the Assistant Superintendent and the boss of the guards, she had business to discuss with the school principal.

Stephen spoke up from his chair, probably just wanting to brown-nose, “This is

his day off, Joyce. This is such a small school he only works part of the week.”

“You heard about the fight this morning, right.” She said quizzically, looking at us all in a curious way.

Hearing only a general murmur of agreement she went on, “Well, I was wondering if you guys could help us. We have about thirty different kids to interview this morning as part of our investigation into this fight. I’m taking a group, the Sergeant will take a group, and Ms. Anderson will have another group. Since you deal so much with these kids everyday, and know them pretty well, we were wondering if any would like to join us in these interviews. We are going to try to find out what exactly happened and why. Any piece of information we can get out of these kids the better.” She looked us over again, with her eyes more directly beading down toward each one of us and said, “Any takers?”

Chapter Ten

The room of the Assistant Superintendent had a pleasant air about it, being painted in blue rather than the ever-present beige of the institution. A plant hung in one corner and a poster of mountain goats on another wall. She sat behind the desk, arranging a stack of papers, while I took a chair to one side of her, turned it so I would be facing the inmates as they came in the door and we would begin questioning of them. She was holding a pen between her clasped hands and turned looking at me in a grave manner and saying, her dark eyes flashing out, “Don’t be afraid to speak up here. We need to get as much information out of these guys as possible. I feel there is something going on with the Hispanics that has been stirring up trouble lately, and I’m getting tired of it. Now most of these guys won’t want to talk, so we are going to have to be insistent,

and maybe make a couple of deals. Ask whatever questions you can think of will be helpful.”

While waiting for the next several minutes we talked about how school was going and having to deal with the inmates in the classroom. During this time a tall, lean guard came into the office and said that they were bringing an inmate down from the pod and checking to see if we were ready for him.

When he came in I recognized the inmate from one of my afternoon classes, only his first name came to mind, which was Oscar. I knew him as being a generally reasonable and quiet student, but as many of the inmates, he was probably involved in a prison gang. Initially, I felt that there was a chance he would talk, because we had some good discussions before in the classroom.

He had walked in with his head down, hands cuffed behind him, and two guards, one on each side. After taking the chair opposite Joyce and myself, the guards left the room leaving the door open. I saw that they remain standing just outside of the door.

Oscar seemed to perk up a little after the guards had left and he looked directly at us, almost revealing a faint smirk. It seemed that he knew what to expect and had been rehearsing mentally for it, or perhaps he was even instructed by his peers on how to conduct himself at this important moment.

“What do you know about the fight we had this morning?” Joyce had a very serious look in her eyes and spoke in a firm, authoritative tone of voice. She was leaning forward in her chair looking almost like she was getting to leap across her desk and throttle the young man.

“Nothing.” Oscar looked down at the floor in a blank stare.

“Do you mean that you never heard any talk about the fight before today?” said Joyce.

“No.”

“Are you in with the East-Siders? I see those gang tattoos on your arm.” She continued speaking in a flat but firm tone of voice.

“No, I’m not a gang-banger. I use to be, but not anymore.”

“Why would the Hispanics want to beat up those white kids for? Are they strong-arming people again?” It was typical for any powerful group or individual in prison to strong-arm the weaker ones for snack food and favors.

“No, they’re not doing anything like that.” He gave Joyce a plaintive look.

She continued without missing a beat, “Is Quinn telling the others what to be doing? Now that Lopez is gone someone needs to be leading the pack.” Hearing this from Joyce I knew immediately what she was thinking. Once a strong leader is removed, like Lopez who turned eighteen and had to leave the YOP program to move in with the adults, a power vacuum developed, and oftentimes it can turn violent until another strong leader arises.

“I don’t talk to Quinn.”

“I’ve seen you talking to him in the hallway.” I broke in at this point, calling his bluff.

Looking at me coldly he said, “That is just for school. I don’t see him otherwise.”

Joyce cut in abruptly, leaning still farther across her desk, saying, “What? I see you and him walking together to recreation. Don’t be trying to lie. I can make life difficult for you. And how much time do you have left?”

“Seven years.” He said it as a simple fact of life.

There was a pause at this point. Perhaps Joyce wanted him to think about his situation awhile, a situation that I had started to see as being unreal. Here was a seventeen year old kid, sitting in chains in a maximum security prison, desperately trying to lie his way out of his gang affiliations. It was like a fish getting caught in the mouth of a bear and trying to tell the bear that he was not a real fish.

I broke the silence by trying a different approach by saying, “You seem like a pretty good kid to talk to in class, and I respect you for that. And I know why some kids would want to beat up Williams or Catlin, because of the nature of their crimes, but Stephennson? I mean he does’nt do anything but hang out by himself and draw pictures. Why would anyone want to beat him up for?”

“I don’t know.” He was again talking with his head down, trying not to look at us, to give our presence any personal recognition.

Joyce began again, “What is Banderas saying these days? We know that he broke from Quinn and is now trying to start his own gang. That must be making life a bit rough for you boys, having to pick sides now. Maybe even causing some in-fighting.”

Oscar said, “I don’t know anything about Banderas.”

“You need to tell all those people that you never talk to that if there are anymore fights I’ll have the whole unit locked up until doomsday, and that means cold sack meals. You understand?” said Joyce, sounding frustrated by his constant denials.

“When are we going back to school?” This time Oscar looked up at us, expecting a direct answer to his question.

Joyce gave out a tired sounding breath and said, “We’ll see.”

I was surprised by Joyce’s knowledge of inmate life. She seemed to know who was hanging with who. And she knew which strings to pull with the hope of getting more information. I supposed she had been through these interviews so much that it was all routine.

Sitting back in her chair and folded her arms in front of her and went on, “I’m guessing the investigation will take awhile. This fight included quite a few kids, so you can expect to stay in your cells until you hear from us. We have a lot of things to look at before we can feel safe in letting any of you guys back out.”

“Do you know how long Quinn is going to be in the hole?” Oscar asked.

“At this point it would be very difficult to say. If you guys would just learn how to settle differences between you all in a more civilized manner he won’t be over there. Is that too much to ask?” Joyce gave him a hard look, hoping for some maturity in his response.

Oscar looked her in the eye stating, “I know what you’re saying. It is just that some of these guys like to power trip. You know how it is in prison. You have to be powerful to be anyone, and you do that by beating on other people. If you’re top dog, you’re special. If you feel powerful you do not have to feel afraid. These people around here are animals. Anything can happen. People are always going to get beat up because of the way we have to live. Man, my parents bathroom is bigger than the cell I live in. How can we learn respect if you never show respect to us? I know we messed up our lives, but it looks like no one is really trying to rehabilitate here. The school is OK, but when you are looking at doing so much time in prison, who cares about it?” He

started to squirm a little in his chair, wiggling his hands that were still behind him as though the cuffs had begun to bite into his flesh. Perhaps it was a way to emphasize his point, I thought.

Oscar took a breath, settled back down in his chair and continued, “You get so worried over a couple of white boys getting beat up, but what about the mental scarring we all go through everyday in this place? Does anyone really think about that? I know what I’m talking about because I’ve seen how prison can affect people. It can make them more crazy than before. I don’t know how people can say that prison protects society from criminals when it only makes them meaner when they leave.”

Feeling that this was similar to many of the discussions I had with inmates in my classroom, I spoke up, “You would be surprised to find out how many of us would agree with you, but just don’t feel like walking around with picket signs. If they could figure out how to program people like robots, they wouldn’t need prisons, right? The problem is that some people have a hard time learning how to take care of themselves. If you learn anything in prison it should be the importance of caring for yourself, and not depending on other people to do it for you.” I paused to see if he was hearing me.

Not knowing where his mind was and beginning to feel frustrated because he was refusing to even look at me while I was talking to him, I asked, “So are you ready to level with us and be your own man or are you going to punk out because you are afraid of what your buddies will say?”

Hearing my pointed comment a slight grin appeared on his face and while raising his head up he said, “Wouldn’t it be nice if it could be that simple. I’ve got seven years

left in this place and when I get out, I'll be my own man.”

His final comment ended our interview with Oscar. Following him, we talked to seven other inmates, all of which had very little if absolutely nothing to say.

Sitting there in the office I was confronted with the intensely narrow and grim reality of prison life, of how inmate culture was based on gangs and their harsh code of conduct. Snitches were usually brutally assaulted and ended up in the hole for their own protection. Like the dark side of any institution, these youths had created their own mortifying culture, just for a sense of personal ownership, and were refusing to compromise with the adults. Even though prison had their bodies, it was the grim reality of gang life that had their minds. A life that amounted to nothing more than a slug that lives beneath logs that have fallen to the forest floor.

Having returned to the cabin after a wearisome day at work, I found walking through the cloudy and moist weather of winter to be quite soothing. Wearing a thin hiking parka and sweat clothes, the dogs and I rambled restlessly into the leafless, moss-covered, and dripping wet, emerald-green forest. The Prussian blue skies marched on incessantly, with the winds becoming fiercer in their flight from the ocean, streaming across the mountains and dumping their marine mists that would often turn into days of rain. Irregardless of the elements, I stuck to the daily walks, as much for myself as for the dogs. Once back in the cabin I would always enjoy drying off by the evening fire. It was a welcome way to cap off the day.

I began to notice while walking through the woods in the twilight winter afternoons that the bare branched trees were often arrayed with a wealth of droplets,

collected from the rain or the mist, calmly clinging to the wet limbs. Then on one afternoon I saw a notable tree with crystalline droplets adorning its' branches and I felt the sight to be rather striking. Perhaps it is the roundness or thickness of the bare branches with numerous droplets each reflecting the winters' afternoon dull light, or maybe something else was there at work. Later, I compared it to a Christmas tree, one with a variety of burnished bulbs clinging to the many branches. The impression that arose was both complex and simple at the same time. It was a intuitive sensation that brought a feeling of awe and reverence. Out of the many of times walking through the damp woods it was the only time this extraordinary feeling came over me. What happened was that I suddenly perceived how beautiful each droplet on that particular tree looked, and when I went up close the droplets all contain a reverse image of the surrounding landscape. This one tree had nearly a thousand droplets delicately clinging to its branches. In what only can be described as a revelatory moment, I felt that the tree was symbolizing the fundamental structure of the universe, while within that form individual worlds were being symbolized by the diamond-like droplets. I imagined that each watery crystal of reflective light clinging to the bare branches contained its own being, its own separate reality, silently whispering questions of darkness and light, of life and death, to the surrounding world. It was as though the tree represented a universe that held innumerable worlds within its dark, swaying branches. They were worlds that had fallen from a gray misty sky, only to hang precariously on the branches of the dim forest before dropping silently into the dark earth. It was incredible to think of how many precious but passing worlds the tree contained, hanging like a shroud of jewels about its wooden but luxuriant form, all within the gray light of winter.

I returned to the cabin feeling perplexed by the intensity of the experience I had in the woods. Once the fire began to roar I sat down with a glass of ruby port wine, thinking about the perceptions I had that aroused such emotions within me. After several minutes of deliberations I decided that it would always be difficult to understand and to draw a line between where the life of the forest began and the life of the individual ended.

Chapter Eleven

When the snow came a few days later I was not ready for it. The days were nearing the end of November and I never thought snow would fall so early in the year. But it was at night and I had been inside my cabin reading, when I decided to step outside to check on my dogs and to gulp down some fresh air. The porch light spread its thin rays out away from the log building into the ancient darkness of the forest. There sifting through a light breeze were falling the icy crystals of winters' arrival. I imagined that the mountain behind the cabin was slowly becoming buried in a blanket of whiteness.

The following morning as I went out to my truck, I saw that the land was clothed in a fresh covering of snow. The door to the truck did not give at all when I tried to pry it open. Thinking that it could be locked I inserted the key and that did no good either. Then I realized that during the night a thin coating of ice had encapsulated my truck. Once before I had to get warm water and pour it over the door to open it. But this time only a little force was need to gain entry. Once inside the truck I was amazed by the sight of incredibly fine art appearing on my windshield. The ice formed swirls and curls in the most fascinating leaf-like patterns all across the windshield. In the space where the

wipers worked one consistent pattern of icy gyrations formed, while surrounding that other arabesque shapes gave both life and new meaning to the glass. It was truly a work of wonder to see what nature can do when left to its own devices. There was a fine intelligence being articulated before me, one that can conspire with various elements in an act of self expression. I sat looking intently at the wonder of it all for a couple of minutes and then went back outside to scrap it off. I was already running late and was in a hurry to get to work.

Doug sat back in his chair like it was intermission time in a movie theater. Chatting on and off again with peers for the whole twenty minutes since class had started, he was producing little if any work. There were only a couple of other students in the room and they were working well on individualized assignments that I had given to them as they walked into the room. Fortunately they were doing their best to ignore Doug.

“Doug, I know you want to get some credit, so why don’t you buckle down and get some work going?” I said this casually, in a matter of fact manner, learning how to be patient with noncompliant students. His long, black hair hung down straight and uncombed passed his slim shoulders. By all appearances this was going to be one of his slow days. I had let him slide before on similar days, because when he does work he can get a lot done.

Doug spoke up, “You see all that rain outside? Man, it is a gloomy today. How can I work on such a depressing day?”

I knew he was half joking and expecting a comment back from me in a like manner. I decided to make a point instead. “Hey, I’m working right? I have to

come to work rain or shine, 220 days a year.”

A slight smile emerged from his face as he responded, “Yeh, but you have a bunch of bills to pay and I don’t. I’m a free man in that sense.” He was practically chuckling while saying this.

“You think the only reason I come to work is to pay bills?” I asked.

“Well, I know your not desperate for our companionship.”

“Everyone needs to have some kind of work that they can be doing. It is work that helps them to feel that their life is meaningful in some way.”

“So teaching prisoners things that they really don’t care about is meaningful for you?”

“Hey, wait a minute now. Education is a lot more than just reading, writing and arithmetic. Have you ever heard of Plato? He started the idea of a liberal education. It was based on a story about a group of people inside of a cave. You want to hear it?”

“You’ll probably tell it even if I said no.” Turning to one of his peers he chuckled.

I continued, “Well, on my way to work I often think of this story because it deals with people who are bound and live in a cave. They were prisoners too, but they had imprisoned themselves by the way they saw things. By the way they saw the world around them. It goes along with the idea that the worst prison of all is a mental one. Plus, this story will tell you a lot about how I see my job of teaching, and why it is so important to society.” I paused for a minute to collect my thoughts.

Doug chuckled again and said, “Sure Adams, you tell that to the guys in the hole.”

“Doug, now listen carefully. Plato felt that education should help people live with

a greater sense of insight and awareness. That meant more than just knowing about things in the world. People should be able to see more deeply into the nature of things. If those people in the hole could do that, maybe they would not be in the hole; they might not be in prison at all. Plato explained it by a story. It goes like this.” I took a quick look at my other students and they appeared to be listening so I went on. “There once was a cave in ancient Greece where deep inside of it dwelt a bunch of people who had been taken prisoners for some weird reason; they were chained up and spending their time doing nothing more than staring into the back wall of the cave, where a dancing gang of mysterious shadows could be seen flitting back and forth across the back wall. The shadows were there because, unknown to the people, farther up in the cave was a fire, and the light from this fire was casting these enticing shadows.”

Doug’s eyes lit up and he spoke out enthusiastically, “I think I saw this on a TV show! There’s a monster in the cave that eats humans, right?” He turned around laughing and looked at the other students

“No Doug, there is no monster in this story. Please just listen.” I went on, “One day one of the bound figures was able to break loose from his bondage, his chains that is, and walked away from the others who still sat there as before staring at these bird-like shadows dancing about on the cave wall as though it was some strange magic. This freed person soon came to recognize that the shadows were nothing in and of themselves, but merely illusions brought about by a nearby fire, that none of them ever saw, but was helping to keep them warm. I mean, I guess that was why there was a fire.” I leaned back in my chair and crossed a leg over my knee. I went on, “After seeing the fire and the spellbinding effect it had on the people, he continued up the cave farther to

discover the entrance, and a fresh breeze coming from the world outside. I mean, this really blow the guy away. Could you imagine living in a deep, dark hole in the ground and then one day discovering the whole outdoors and the effect it would have on you?”

Doug chirped up quickly, “I knew this one guy who lived in the hole for about three years and then was released to go home. I bet there are other guys who have spent more time than that in the hole, and then because their time is up, they get to go home.”

I replied, “That is not a bad comparison Doug. Living in a trapped existence for a number of years was about what these people were doing.” I continued, “Well, he was surprised to see the true nature of the world. But not enough to forget about his buddies back down inside of the cave and the bondage and the delusions that were holding them prisoners. Being a fairly decent guy he decided to go back and try to help them out. So he took a couple deep breathes of fresh air, turned around, and headed back into the dark depths of the cave. After passing the fire he soon found the people sitting there much like before, still staring blankly at the dancing shadows on the back wall. He tried to explain the situation to these people. He talked about the fire that was directly behind them and how it was casting the shadows. He even tried to explain to them the emptiness of shadows, of how they were not worth the time the people were spending watching them. I mean this guy put a lot into it with these people, working every angle possible. And what do you think? Do you think many of those people listened to him? Do you think he got many of them to turn around, see the fire for themselves, and then leaving the shadows to go with him back outside of the cave?”

Doug seemed to be the only one in the class willing to brave any comments. He

said, “Them people probably felt no need to be doing anything special. They got what they need, some entertainment watching those shadows on top of it all. Sometimes people are just happy with what they got. You know, keepin it tight with their homies.”

“So you think it is easy for people to accept being a prisoner, to not care about making any really personal changes,” I said.

“Why do you think so many people come back to prison. Some of these people probably feel more comfortable here than they do on the outs.” Doug said pointedly.

“That is a good point. But we all know that there is a lot more to life than being institutionalized. I think Plato was saying that freedom is being able to see the truth that lays hidden within things. And the more meaningfully we can see into things, the better we are able to live. Do you understand that?”

Javier, tall thin student, was usually quiet, but he decided to speak up suddenly from his desk, from the back of the room, “Freedom is being able to chill with your homies. You know, being with your own kind and no one is messin with you.”

“I think there is a lot of truth to that. Family people probably feel most free with their own families. I think I feel the most free when walking through the woods. Other people might only feel free when driving around in a fancy car. Have you ever had that feeling?”

“You mean when your cruising with your homies. Man, when I leave here I just want to drive forever. I remember that on a Saturday nights we would drive around for hours and be partying, and we would have some girls with us. Now that was cool.” Doug was smiling, knowing that he was talking for the other students in class.

At this point I was about to give up. How could I explain the finer points of Plato's philosophy of the Cave to a bunch of juvenile delinquents? These guys were fixated on girls, cars, and drugs. I felt that it was only toward the disheartening temptations of life that they were attracted, while the truth of life past by them in all of its eternal glory.

I thought for a minute and then tried one more time. "Did you ever want something really bad and then when you got it, it didn't appeal to you any longer?"

Silence enveloped the classroom, a few students acted as though they did not understand the question. So I continued, "Did you ever meet a person and at first you thought one thing about them, but when you got to really know the person, your idea of them changed completely?"

Javier spoke up pointedly, "I knew a girl once and everyone said she was loose, you know? So I took her out on a date and she almost slapped me when I made a pass. Boy was I surprised."

I said, "So, did you stop believing in rumors after that?"

"Actually, I did and I was kind of pissed at my friends. She was a nice girl and would not go out with me again." His voice had a serious tone that attracted the interest of his peers.

Feeling a sudden sincerity in the moment I quickly pounced on it hoping to elaborate on my point, "While chasing after a quick thrill you found something more important. A good girl with a good heart, right?"

Javier went on, "She wasn't just another hoodrat. She knew things and was more mature than she looked. You couldn't fool that girl with an act, you know. She

wasn't giving nothing away to anyone." A hint of disappointment colored the tone of this voice.

I asked, "So you're saying she was street-smart for her own age. She knew how to take care of herself."

"Yeah." Said Javier.

Doug cut in, as though trying to speak for the others, "I've been around, seen a lot and know a lot of things, but I am not book smart."

"Well Doug," I replied, "sometimes I think the smartest people are simply the ones who take good care of themselves."

He smiled and gave me a slight chuckle in agreement.

"I mean you don't want to be living in the dark all the time. There is more to life than just wanting things. The worst despair comes when people forget about who they are and get lost and crazy chasing around in a hungry world." I stopped not wanting to beat them over the head with my sermon. But I felt the urge to do so swell up strongly inside of me. Similar to the bounded figures who are scrutinizing the dancing darkness on the cave's wall, many of my students refused to see the liberating light of reason, which I tried desperately to show them. Only the enticing gestures of flitting shadows appeared to interest these young people. It was toward only disheartening temptations that they were attracted, while real life marched by silently in all of its eternal glory. If I could only teach them to turn around and see that their grim reality was more mental than physical, then I would have felt like I had done my job as a teacher. This, the smallest of tasks, appeared to be the greatest of educational challenges.

Suddenly I heard someone shouting loudly from the hallway, "Fight, fight!"

I looked out my door to see Stephen standing in the hallway just outside of his room, waving his arms and trying to get a guard to come and break up a fight that presumably had just occurred in his classroom.

Within seconds the two large burly guards who had been playing cards at a small table in the hallway hustled down to his classroom and disappeared through the doorway with Stephen following close behind. In a few seconds the two guards reappeared walking smartly out of the room each holding a bedraggled inmate by their upper arms. Both had inmates their hands cuffed behind their backs, their heads lowered as to cover their faces from prying eyes, and were being hurriedly transported down the mostly empty hallway. One of the inmates had blood covering his nose and red splash marks on the top of his T-shirt. At this time two other guards had come up from downstairs and helped the earlier guards haul the inmates away. Standing near the door to my classroom I knew both inmates would be taken to the “hole” and then questioned later.

“Well Stephen, don’t tell me you pissed them off with that grammar lesson again.” I had walked up to him and was trying to lighten the moment. I left the door open to my room so I could keep an eye on the students.

Stephen turned to me and said excitedly, “Ray just walked up to Ben and started pounding on the guy. Ben was just sitting in his chair not doing nothing, and Ray beats on him with his fists right in the middle of class! Did you see his face, it was covered with blood! There’s even blood on his desk and the floor.” Stephen had his arms folded tightly across his chest, pacing in tight circles in front of his classroom, looking obviously distraught and perhaps felt some guilt in not being able to stop the fight before it happened. I knew he liked Ben and it must hurt to see him becoming a victim of such a

savage assault.

I said, “You know how the inmates deal with things. Ray must have been making a point of some kind. Maybe Ben owed some money or refused to work for the wrong people.”

Still shaking his head Stephen seemed to calm down and said, “I know. I better get back in class. They still haven’t finished their end-of-chapter test and I don’t want them to think that this fight will get them out of it.”

“You’re a tough teacher Stephen, be gentle on them.” I said with a smile. I returned to my room with some sense that order had been restored to the school and sat at my desk and let the students work on individual projects. Anything as long as they were fairly quiet and well behaved. The lack of questions concerning the fight, coming from the students, seemed to indicate that they knew it was coming. I figured they probably knew the fight would take place a couple of days ago.

Chapter Twelve

It was after school that same day that I spotted Marge in her classroom alone grading some papers. I decided to check in and see if she was willing to talk for a few minutes, so I walked into her room and across to the far wall to peer momentarily out one of her barred windows to the field outside. The sky was a soggy dark blue because it had been raining hard most of the day. It was a bleak looking December afternoon.

“Mind if I visit for a little bit?” I asked probingly while turning to face her.

“No, not a bit.” She said though not looking up from her paper work.

“You were born out here, right? Do you ever get use to the constant rain?” I had

decided to start my discussion with a weather question.

“Sure you do. You just have to get used to walking around with webbed feet.” She looked up and gave me a smile and then brushed back her reddish short hair quickly with her hand.

I stared into the falling rain while continuing on with weather talk, “I hope you don’t mind me saying this and I know it will sound strange, but I don’t know how else to put it. The longer I stay out here the more I feel a sense of emotional estrangement, like self dissipation, of this strange kind of falling away from the center of life and just being blown away, of dissolving into a cold rainy wind.” I turned to see that Marge was still looking down and correcting some papers on her desk. She made no response to my talk so I went on, “Perhaps it comes from living away from my wife and in a small log cabin out in the middle of nowhere. Sometimes it is hard to find a warm and comfortable place out there in the woods. But these endless rainy days do get to you after awhile. Even lately, while driving home by myself, I have wondered if our lives, this wet world, and the never-ending rain could exist as all one and the same thing. You know? Like looking at sea water and finding that it is hard to separate the water from the bugs that live in it.”

Joyce looked up from her work and said, “Well, now that is a sad thought. Would you mind telling me what is really bothering you?”

I smiled at her shrewd remark. There was another issue that dragged me into her room that I wanted to discuss so I continued, “Why did you become a teacher?” I leaned my back against the wall to listen to her reply.

Taking a moment to think she said, “To help kids to learn new things, I like working with young people, and to get my summers off.”

I said, "I always wanted to be able to help those kids that were falling through the cracks of the educational system. Those kids who were in danger of doing stupid things and ruining their lives." I paused and then went on, "But sometimes I think I'm not doing much good." Turning to look back out at the rainy weather, seeing it falling through the dark sky in a thick downpour I continued, "I always remember when I was a kid back in North Dakota, in winter time, how I loved to go ice-skating. We would find long patches of frozen river where there was no deep snow and spend hours in sub-zero weather skating around there. Even today, thoughts of briskly skating down a snowy, tree lined river into the surrounding countryside still enchants me. The feel of the frosty air striking those red cheeks, snow creeping up the ankles, and the sight of bare black trees silhouetted against a crystal white landscape, all somehow made for a magical moment." I paused to absorb the images that came to mind, while still looking out at the rainy afternoon. "Kids don't open up well in classrooms. They need to get outdoors and have some real experiences."

"You can always try cold water surfing at La Push. I don't think the prison will mend a field trip. They rent wet suits in Port Angeles." The sound of sarcasm was deeply embedded in her voice.

I continued regardless, "Have you ever heard that Joni Mitchell's song where she has this refrain that goes, 'I wish I had a river / I could skate away on.' To me it brings back those days as a kid who found a sense of personal liberation skating down a frozen river. It was like sensing the raw power of the earthly elements that lay submerged behind its' physical presence." A strong wind had stirred outside and I could see the trees in the distance bending slightly, indicating the rain was now becoming a

winter storm.

“I know what you mean, and it is a nice thought. I think it’s like finding love. Sometimes you have to surrender yourself to your lover before they will open themselves up to the relationship. My husband was that way.” Speaking roughly, without looking up, and still grading papers, she sounded as though the memories of her past had stirred some raw emotions.

“I just find it so difficult to teach these kids how to care about a healthy life. Either they don’t care or they just don’t understand it. What do you think?”

“Personally I think it will take years before many of them will understand the value of a good life and how to take care of it. So I just teach what I should be teaching and if they want to be little turds, that is all up to them.”

“But isn’t that sending the message that they may not be worth caring about?”

“Do you think they care about the crimes they have committed against their victims? Do you think they can care about us? These people are brutal animals. They prey on each other.” Her eyes blazed as she spoke.

“I would rather not be judging my students that way. I know how difficult they can be, and that many of them will probably spent much of their lives in prison. But as a teacher I treat the rich the same as the poor, the dumb and the same as the smart, the wicked and the same as the good. I care because I believe it’s my job to care and not just to mechanically provide academic instruction.” I had started to pace back and forth along the wall while speaking. I doubted that Marge would understand my feelings. I spoke

out in an desperate way, trying not to fall into incoherence. My pacing stopped only when I had stopped talking and I turned to face her, looking carefully for a response.

She seemed to have paused, reflected on my statements, and then spoke, “Sometimes I feel that with the stress of the job, everything that goes on in the classroom at one time with all the different kids, I’m lucky if I can even mechanically do a good job. I care about these kids too, but it easily gets lost in the business of teaching.”

So much of our humanity as teachers gets lost in the mechanics of the job, I thought to myself as I left her classroom to walk back to my room. She to needed time to get caught up on her paperwork so I decided to cut the talk short. We all get overwhelmed in this business, I thought. But it was our humanity that was undeniably the most important lesson we could be providing our young people, especially here in prison. I continued to ponder as I began to prepare for my afternoon classes. Somehow, I felt, we were throwing the baby out with the bath water. That in the desperate pursuit to “educate” our kids, we were squeezing out their sense of humanity. This also seemed to fit in with the ungodly importance given to sports and other forms of competition. This was the makings of the raw foundations of the “rat race”.

The rain had gradually cleared leaving an azure blue sky by the time I got home that evening. But everything that had happened at school stayed glued to my mind, even the conversation with Marge. After changing into sweat clothing and rounding up the dogs I decided to try a different area for an evening hike. That by finding a different location, one that had not yet become routine, it would be help to take my mind off of the dreariness of school. Especially after the desolate day I had just been through with

the fight and apathetic students.

Wanting to not drive far, I remembered passing a logging road winding through a clear-cut area and then climbing up and disappearing into several tall and thickly forested hills. It wasn't much in natural beauty, but it would suffice in offering the needed exercise, a trail through the woods and fresh air. Plus, who knows what I might find hidden away in those verdant hills?

Orion leaped out of the truck door and ran nearly a quarter of a mile before stopping to look back at me, his black and white wolfish profile silhouetted against the wilderness that laid ahead. Suka, showing her age of nine years, sniffed the ground gingerly and occasionally would roll around in a strange scent while making her way along slowly behind. She reminded me of a woman strolling through and shopping in an urban mall. She would always stop to inspect practically anything and everything that struck her interest during the hike. Sometimes she would be so far behind I would worry about her becoming cougar meat. It simply was not safe for a lone dog out in these woods. But she usually kept within visual range, while Orion did much the same ahead of me. That is when he had not disappeared into the thick woods following a scent trail.

I suppose, for whatever reason, they felt it was my duty to take up the middle of our little group.

It was an energizing hike, seeing the moss covered forest and some healthy sounding streams pouring down the steep hillsides. Being so close to the cabin, I felt the location could serve well as an occasional, alternate route for hiking. These thoughts occurred to me as I was returning from the hike, having walked back down from the steep, wooded hillside to the ravaged clear-cut landscape below. By the number of mud

puddles present I knew that the afternoon had earlier seen several scattered rain showers, and the plump, dark clouds were still drifting across a sky containing a few deep pools of blue and intermittent streams of sunlight. For me this was perfect hiking weather because it was cool, moist, but not overly wet.

As I arrived to the bottom of the surrounding hills that I had just hiked across, where the rough, logging road began to level off, I noticed the most beautiful of rainbows standing directly in front of me. Never before, among the many rainbows I had seen over my lifetime, did I see one present itself in such a direct and magnificent manner.

And if I remembered correctly, I usually saw them while I am driving. But this afternoon, when I saw the multi-colored arches flaring upwards, it was standing directly in front of me, like a colossal portal through which I was to enter. The mere fact that I had found myself standing in and walking toward the dead center of such a beautiful creation left me thunderstruck. When I looked 45 degrees to my left and right the ends of the rainbow could be seen falling into the forest. Immediately ahead of me the enormous archway glistened wildly in the moist afternoon sky. All the colors, from greenish blue to violet red, were seen as rivers of light mingling and co-mingling, as though they had just erupted from some mysterious treasure trove of the earth. Looking straight ahead and through the scintillating archway, I could see the mountains, sky, and forest that laid beyond, as though they had become a picture framed by the colorful bands of light.

Distantly, a large crow squawked and flew through the middle of it all, as though to lead me on. Turning around to look directly behind, the sun was nearing the horizon, slowly settling into a layer of bluish clouds, and casting out an elongated shadow of myself upon the gravel logging road.

Out of curiosity I decided to continue walking straight ahead, even though the road I was on made a sudden turn at that point to the right. Hiking over the scrub brush, ancient tree stumps, large boulders and mounds of gravel, I kept my eyes on the sprawling, vivid rainbow ahead of me. I wanted to see if it would stand still for me and let me actually walk beneath it, since it looked so real.

But the farther I went, the fainter it became. After a short distance I knew that the sight of the beautiful archway would only diminish. It was not a fixed object in the sky, and with the setting sun, it would soon disappear forever. But the memory of it would last.

When I got back to the cabin and sat down I continued to ponder on the significance of this strange and beautiful event. It made a startling impact on me, and I cannot help but to think that there was some sort of natural symbolism at work. Could it be that certain natural occurrences as seen by us through the misty veil of our lives contain a form of cryptic correspondence from god? Does the earth speak in terms of “signs” and “omens”, as believed by those who know her the best, the aboriginal people of the world?

I felt myself quiver at the depth of the subject, fearing the impact it could have on me. For the sake of a balanced mind there are some questions best left unanswered.

As I sit there that evening, alone in the cabin, quietly writing out my thoughts, I realized that my heart only knew this: To me Nature is a grand threshold through which I seek to travel for love and salvation. For this I strive to remain focused and will forever be walking onward.

Chapter Thirteen

Around 7 PM, as winter settled in for the long haul, the passing moisture in the air would slowly turn into snow, and it would fall heavily in the forest, continuing on until bedtime, around 9PM and then stop. It would drift down in large, fluffy and moist flakes, creating a swirling whiteness that stood out starkly from the surrounding darkness.

I would walk outside and turn on the porch light to peer out at the night, seeing the tempest of flying particles looking especially dramatic under the light. Blanketing the surrounding woods in a crystalline whiteness, the beauty of the snowfall made even the chill of winter a joy to experience.

One evening at about this time I went to the porch to split and collect more wood for my fire. Just as I was loading a bundle of kindling into my arms the sound of an owl boomed from the encircling forest. If the moon could visit the earth and give out a call, it would sound like the owl, I thought to myself while looking into the dark forest.

In ancient times to hear an owl close to home was a sign of bad luck. The deep but distinctive resonance that comes from the nearby woods never leaves the memory of one who has heard it. Stopping to absorb the richness of the moment I stood quietly contemplating the moment, dreaming of the nightly creator of such a primeval hoot. Could it have been a Great Horned Owl? Great Gray Owl? Or perhaps the smaller Saw-Whet Owl? I will never know, and it really does not matter; only the magic of the moment was important.

The mixture of snow, the fathomless winter forest, and the sound of the owl, instilled a deep sense of the haunting presence of life. A sense of life not found in

everyday society, but rather a presence only found in darkness and the nightly dreams of our lives.

I suddenly remembered the dreams I had of the witches, seeking to attack me and then turning into owls and flying back into the wilderness. That even this apparently empty portion of my existence may have more life to it than I supposed. That the ignored and neglected and twilight fragments of my inner life may have an unimagined importance. That what I have thrown away in haste can and will come back to haunt me. While standing there on the porch I had a feeling that if I did not do something to search for and try to better understand my inner life I would end up wasting away in a “quiet desperation”. That if I did not push to explore the various mysteries my life would drain away listlessly and fall into the horror of night.

This one owl, on that dark and lonely night, with a single sound from the woods, brought to my mind these innumerable and deeply felt thoughts, leaving me to ponder more than I would like to have done on that single snowy night.

I thought back to a novel I read, about a priest in British Columbia who heard an owl speak his name and then he knew of his forth coming death. An owl who speak of death? In the forest, especially at night, much can speak of death. Even the wind could do that, if you listen carefully. Then I thought of the cougars in the area. Of how they come crawling at night to seek their prey, which may be household dogs and cats. Cougars speak of death also, but not with the same mastery as owls. Owls are the experts in speaking of death. Nobody does it better.

I sat quietly in my cabin for sometime that night. I wondered where they learned that awesome, archetypal speech. What gave them the power to rise so far above the

mundane world of humanity? How and why could the apparent mindless world of the wilderness create such creatures that live so distinctively? What purpose could they be serving God?

Again I found myself asking questions that only ate away at my fragile sense of sanity. Owls were only feathered creatures that ate mice in the middle of the night. Why had I suddenly seen them to be the harbingers of potent omens? Perhaps I was spending too much time alone, listening to an often nonsensical inner voice, or the woods were beginning to get to me.

The incident that night was eventually shrugged off as minor, inconsequential, the product of an over active imagination. But then soon afterwards, only a couple of days later, something else happened that struck me deeply. It happened one night after watching an old John Wayne movie entitled, "The Searchers". It was a 50's classic, often stated to be his favorite, and I enjoyed watching his moody portrayal of a cowboy character. Perhaps I drank too much that evening because I downed a little more than my usually two glasses of wine. After the movie, as usual, I had just turned on the AM radio and the song, "Earth Angel", another 50's classic, was blaring out from a Canadian station. Soon I found myself sprawled out on the floor of my cabin, with Orion in a tight hold, his back to the floor and all four legs sticking straight up in the air, with me looking down his long nose singing the song, "Earth Angel, earth angel, will you be mine."

I knew I was teasing him, waiting for a wrestling match, but he only seemed to be enjoying it, soaking in the extra attention. Further trying to get a response, I put my arm under his upper torso in a vain attempt to lift him off the floor, but sensing

my intentions he turned and jumped, scratching me in the face with one paws, and made for the door. Not being able to open it himself, I had him trapped, and continued to sing the “Earth Angel” song as I was hearing it on the radio, while still trying to engage him in fun-loving, scuffling match. Fortunately, the song was over in only a few minutes and the madness of the moment gradually sunk in. I had never song to any of my dogs before and I did not think it was a good idea. So I let him run outside and I settled down to looking over used trucks for sale on the Internet for the rest of the evening.

I had just crawled into bed when the telephone rang. Walking through the densely dark cabin and across a cold wooden floor in my bare feet I grabbed the phone.

It was my wife, “Fay called from Oregon and says that she wants to come back home again,” Her voice sounded tired and anxious. Fay was nearly twenty-one, my step-daughter and a girl at odds with her mother ever since she quit going to high school. I knew how my wife and Fay could claw away at each other like sword dueling pirates.

“Well, what you think? Can you two get along all right?”

“If she can talk to me in an appropriate manner, with some respect, plus go back to school. It might be ok.” The sound of apprehension was showing in her voice.

That was always the big issue. She was an attractive, intelligent girl, with a good personality, who had dropped out of high school and mother never forgave her. Now she had a boyfriend who lived from one job to the next, staying with friends in another state, and now she wants to come back home because she had a fight with her roommates.

I decided to level with my wife, hoping for a constructive dialogue, not an

argument. “I’ve seen how easily you can blow up on this girl. She told me once that you always seem to find fault with her. Please, listen,” I paused for a second to collect my thoughts. My feet were getting cold so I sat down in a kitchen chair, deciding to leave the lights turned off. Only corner night light in the living room revealed a faint glow.

“At school we get all these behavior problem kids, and the only way the teachers can manage them is by keeping the focus on the important things in class. I mean, if we were to stop every time one of the kids did something stupid there would be no time left for teaching.”

I knew that she would not understand how teaching in prison had anything to do with her relationship with Fay, so I continued, “People will always be doing stupid things. That is the nature of being human. As a parent you do not want to be getting caught up on negative side of your daughter’s life. As an adult you need to be standing off at a distance, remaining calm and caring, keeping everything safe and sane. That is your job as a parent. Do not let her bad attitudes disturb you. Remember, young people will always be testing, experimenting, going from one bad idea to another. So keep your focus as a parent simple, strong, and consistent, seeing only what is important, namely, in her case, going back to school, plus the fact that you love her. Keep the focus positive, not letting yourself get sucked into her negativity. This will help to enrich your relationship with her.” Stopping to see if she understood me, and feeling that I had just told a mother not to get emotionally involved with the life of her daughter, I sat in that cold, dark kitchen, wanting to go back to bed.

“Mark, I don’t blow up like I use to. We can talk a lot about things. But sometimes she treats me like I was her daughter. She doesn’t listen to me at all. It makes

me feel so helpless. My God, she has not done anything good in her life, and she can do so much.” I could hear her past years of struggling with this girl in the tone of Lisa’s voice. She sounded like a soul lost in the shadows, seek a guiding light.

The conversation was following the same pattern we had discussed so many times before about Fay and her lack of responsibility. It was not a problem we would solve over the telephone and I was getting tired of talking about it.

“Just keep your calm, show only love, and do not move from the focus of her going to school. It may take awhile, but she’ll see the light. Think of it this way. You’re like a lighthouse that sends out its’ signal to guide ships through dark rocky waters. The captain of a passing ship has to make his own decisions. But hopefully he will see you as a guide and be able to keep his ship on a safe course. As a parent of a troubled, young adult, that is all you can do. Guide her by your example and love. Help her move toward the light by showing a steadfast love. Modeling is the greatest of all teachers. Always keep the focus positive, constructive and she will eventually come around. You want her to feel enriched by your presence, right? Isn’t that what motherhood is all about?”

I had said about all I could that night, feeling colder very minute while sitting there in the dark. The rest of the talk I simply listened to her going on about past incidents that she could never forget or forgive. Fay had treated her poorly and she would not forgive such transgressions any time soon. Lisa felt that there had been too many broken promises.

When I finally did hang up the telephone I noticed that the cabin had cooled off to a chilly forty-five degrees with the arrival of night. I opened the creaking

outside door to check on the sleeping dogs and saw that a soft flurry of snow was cascading through the surrounding darkness. As the season was nearing winter, the nightly presence of stars were being replaced by a dark sky and falling snow. At least it was better than having it rain all the time, and usually the snow melted soon after hitting the warm, moist ground.

Kitty was already curled up at the foot of the thickly blanketed bed, and with only a night light softly glowing from the living room I quickly leaped beneath the covers, hoping to fall asleep soon. My mind raced back to the conversation with Lisa. We lived so far from each other but still managed to stay in close contact. I wanted seriously to teach her some of the things I was learning in my own life. Things learned from the wilderness and from teaching. Feeling the cold descending through the tar papered bedroom roof I curled up more tightly into a ball, almost into a fetal position.

Sleep would be a welcome relief from the hectic pace of daily life. A sleep where dreams walk so softly through the dark distant corridors of my mind, and whisper with their strangely unearthly dialogue.

I rolled over and stuck my feet beneath Kitty's purring body. Again, I thought of my wife and of why was so difficult for one person to teach another and then fell I into a deep dreamy asleep.

Chapter Fourteen

The next morning, while waiting for my first class of students to arrive, I was called into the principals' office. I hated having to sit in his small chair, pressed for space, while he sat in a much larger one and swiveling around in it only a foot in front of

me, feeling free to take pop shots at me who was feeling stuck up against the wall.

“I just got word from the school district that a formal complaint has been filed against them and the Department of Corrections for not providing education to the inmates in the hole. You know IMU. This does not mean giving them packets to do their work out of. These lawyers want us to be giving them a full day of class just like the other inmates have.” He looked at me as though I was somehow involved in this affair.

I sat up as straight as possible, kept both feet on the floor, and then said, “But we are not allowed in the IMU. That’s where DOC keeps the violent prisoners. Those guys are animals, they are capable of anything. That’s why they’re in the hole.” I paused for a moment then asked, “You mean these lawyers expect us to put them in classrooms?”

The idea was slowly sinking in. Public law stated that every youth had a right to an education, but these kids were severe security risks. Many of them were threatening to start a riot in prison, so they were moved to the hole, or segregation, for the safety of others. They were the ones who would spit in the face of the prison guards, for the lack of any better means of assault.

The Principal went on, “I talked with the district office this morning and they think we should do something now that will help to position ourselves against this coming law suit. So I want you to teach classes in IMU. You’re the special education teacher and there’re going to be special education kids there needing to be served. Mr. Robinson can handle the special education kids we see up here on the education floor. But you’ll still be doing all the paperwork, with assistance from Mr. Robinson, understand?” He removed his eyeglasses as though handing me a decree of some sort. The look in his eyes showed an uncertainty concerning the affair at hand.

I asked, “Do you know where I’ll be teaching these kids? Hopefully not in their cells.”

“No, of course not. IMU has an education room where a couple of inmates can be chained up to small metal desks. I guess they even have a white board in there. The district says we should only plan on a minimum of four hours of instruction per inmate per week. But we have kids in segregation in green pod, so you will have to serve them too. So maybe in the morning you will be with the green pod kids, and then in the afternoon serve kids in the hole. That should cover us well enough for this law suit.” He had laid down his eye glasses and began to rub the back of his neck, as though to relieve stress. Then he turned toward me, his knees almost hitting mine. He continued, “I will talk to the teachers so that they can give you school work to give to the students. All you have to do is to help them with it and give it back to the teachers. For special education kids make sure the IEP is being followed. These lawyers are bound to try to pick us apart regarding special education. So from now on I want you to be documenting everything you are doing, very carefully. Remember: document, document, document.” His eyes glared at me like the eyes of an eagle about to swoop down on a squirrel.

Wanting to change the subject I said, “Boy, teaching kids chained into their chairs. I wonder how many middle school teachers dream of this?” I saw him chuckle a little, and the point served to lighten the moment. But I needed the humor, while sitting there, because I suddenly felt myself being on the hot seat, as though someone had just pinned a bulls’ eye to the back of my shirt. I was going to be right in the middle of a law suit regarding special education and the delivering of education to

students in the hole.

Then feeling a fit of anger I pulled my knees in and sat up straight and said, “We must get only about one or two percent of the juvenile cases here at Clallam Bay. Then it’s only because these are extreme cases, like some kid with a long history of violent crimes, or someone who commits murder something. God, these kids get a better education than most teenagers in regular schools when you look at our teacher to student ratios and the intense structure the prison provides. It is almost like being in a military boarding school. And they don’t have to worry about being assaulted by an adult because they’re housed in a different section. Then these lawyers want to sue us because we are not teaching kids in the hole and filling out the right paperwork? What is it? They just do not like kids being in prison or what?”

Seeing me getting frustrated and angry he said, “I don’t think these lawyers really care about the students. They’re just out to make as much money from the Department of Corrections as possible. The prison here is constantly being suited at a drop of a hat. But we do need to cover ourselves as much as possible. The school district doesn’t have much money to handle these things like DOC.”

I felt myself relax a little while sitting there, thinking about these sudden changes. For whatever reason, he seemed to trust putting me in such a critical position. Even though I would have preferred a much more low key profile. A position that would not be such a focus of legal attention.

Then another wave of anxiety hit me; the reality of the situation had sunk in. “But these people aren’t safe to have around other inmates, much less in a classroom. That’s why they are in the hole. How can I be expected to go in there and teach?”

He quickly responded, looking at me sternly to emphasize his point, “You should only have a few a time, maybe three or four, and they will remain chained up all during class. The chairs in the classroom are made so the inmates will be wearing waist chains and each arm will be chained to the waist, and their legs chained somehow to the floor. But they will be able to write at their desks. Of course, you will also have to crack down more on misbehavior.” He started to wave this pen at me and continued, “You are right, safety is the prime concern with these kids. I was told that you are to have them removed from class for the any signs of disrespect or inappropriate behavior. You do not give them the three strikes and you’re out procedure here. They’re too dangerous for that,

and I certainly do not want you getting hurt down there. So remember,” he started to wave his pen again at me, “to stay out of arm’s reach from these students as much as possible. You know why. And by the way, you’ll be starting this next week, once Delta Unit has all the needed waist restraints.” He threw his pen back on top of his desk as though feeling frustrated over the situation.

It came to me then, the decision to send me to the hole probably was not his, but it came from somewhere else, perhaps the district office or from the prison staff. I could sense that the coming legal battles will either bring the school district and DOC closer together, or tear them apart irrevocably. But in the end I thought the school and my job would survive.

I was not looking forward to leaving my colleagues and the students I had come to know and go into the deep dark bowels of prison to teach kids in the hole. I knew from talking to the school secretary that some of them had been there for a year or more.

What would that do to a kids' mind? A mind that had already been horribly twisted by drugs, violence, and gang life. But I had no choice, and possibly it may prove to be an interesting adventure. At least I'll have something to write home about.

The day following my discussion with the principal, while making a phone call to a parent, I discovered the intense documentation that I was now required to do in order to verify any and all special education procedures. A simple call to a parent was to be thoroughly documented (how, what, when, where, and how) on three different forms: one on special education forms, another in the secretaries office, plus another one in the counselors' office. I was to keep a log on the daily activities taking place in all of my classes, plus an attendance sheet on which I was also to explain the subject, the learning objective, time on task, and results, for each student in the class. I was even spending time in the duty office of Delta unit filling out forms in there, not for the school district but for the Department of Corrections. I was beginning to feel that I could not even breathe without having to run somewhere to document it. But, as I was told, that was how special education operates, on pure documentation. I was beginning to believe that the kids could have me bound and gagged in the classroom, but as long as the paperwork is in order, there were no problems.

Needless to say this situation did take its' toll on my nerves. At least to the point of disturbing my dreams. Toward the end of the work week, in a night of troubled sleep, I had a bewildering and frightening dream. Though it was a vague remembered vision, I saw a balled-up piece paper tumbling across the floor of my cabin. It aroused a feeling in me of not belonging to this earthly world, of having been deformed and disregarded in another, distant universe and then tossed here in a strange, contemptuous disregard.

I remembered trying to think what size and shape it may once have possessed. Could it have been a long, but narrow sheet or maybe a wide almost square piece of paper? Why was it tossed away in such utter disregard? And why did it land here on the floor of my cabin of all places?

The dream brought a feeling of apprehension that was not easily ignored. One concerning the uses we make of paper and the vast networks that pile it high in an uncontrolled fashion. It brought a feeling of what we may wish paper could really say and do in our lives. I kept pondering what this one tossed away piece of paper from my dream may have said before it became crumpled and thrown out in a contemptuous disregard. I remembered feeling at that time, still in my sleep, that if one unwrapped its' ragged form and applied a rational interpretation to its' strange lines and figures, then spread it out across a table, it would probably take on the appearance of a map. A military map showing an array of conflicts, strategies, and potential resources arrayed across a strange land. It would show the inevitable nightly clashes between opposing parties that would force a feeling of hopelessness and despair in the local inhabitants. It would be a delicate but critical picture of conflicting desires and powerful wills. It would be a map of the human spirit in a world at war with itself.

It was a dream that did not easily escape my mind. The next morning, while driving to work through the dark, wet landscape of the Olympic Peninsula, I could not help but to continue wondering what the real purpose was of the vast paperwork in our society. So often while writing out some form of documentation I felt the only reason for it was that people had come to not trust each other, that there was a loss of faith in our society, hence the need for documentation. I could no longer trustfully say that I had

made a phone call to a parent; that was no longer valid. I had to document it.

But on that same dark and damp morning, while driving the winding road over Burnt Mountain, I did not want to thinking about or focus on any weaknesses, any problems with despair in trying to face today's world. While watching the headlights of my truck swerve back and forth across the rainy roadway, I only wanted to think about our land and people, a country that clearly needed a greater sense of faithfulness and a greater sense of vision for itself.

Passing along the dark, wind swept shores of the Straits of Juan de Fuca, I thought of the Clallam Bay community. About how it could be seen as a living web that required a degree of faith to survive and hopefully be able to rise above the push and pull of the passing years. In any search for a vision one must be able to listen within and to listen the shadows that emerge from inner mind, even from our dream worlds, and to know their dialogue, their ever shifting substance and reality. To be able to see clearly and to understand faithfully the face of an evolving darkness that is lodged in the turbulent depths of the human consciousness.

I was so amazed to think that there were so many people struggling to renew their faith in themselves and the universe. A faith that they will survive the eternal night, while others have been forgotten and have lost their meaningfulness. There will always be those people who live in a small quiet village that the larger rat race will keep burning back into the bush. Just like there will always be special education teachers who dream of helping at-risk youth only to find themselves consumed by endless paperwork.

Two more logging trucks past me, going in the opposite direction, throwing pools of water across the windshield. Now that makes six trucks driving out of the forest in the

past twenty minutes, even at this early hour of day. I wondered how many will drive into Port Angeles throughout the day, and where is all that money was going? The people who live out here sure do not have it.

Peering into the pre-dawn gloom before me and nearing the town of Clallam Bay, I could not help but wonder how it was that faith only comes to those who have a belief in a shared destiny, a common purpose and good. America was founded on individualism, get rich quick schemes. But faith cannot support those who seek to rise above others, those who have weakened and betrayed their souls and their people. Those are the people, because of their faithlessness must wander alone and forsaken within their own land and souls. They are the ones who have been tossed away as shown in my dream, like an unwanted and crumpled up piece of paper.

Pulling into town and stopping at a brightly light gas station for a quick breakfast, the rain felt soothing as I stepped out of the truck. Walking pass a crew of loggers getting their own early morning meals and climbing into their muddied work trucks, I took a brief look at the daily headlines of a local newspaper. Just another story of the body of a fisherman found along a local riverbank. I knew that if I kept scanning the paper more stories, more facts of politics, war, the economy, and crime would appear. We were living in the information age and all this worldly material, all these castles in the air, were important, right?

After grabbing a pizza stick I climbed back into the truck and prepared for the last short drive up the wooded hill to the prison; but my mind kept on wondering. What human reason or earthly vision is there that provokes us to become forever faithful? What is it about our lives that makes us want to share and give ourselves in a

blind allegiance? Fear or love? Even when time and nature obscures every movement and every gesture and leaves us knowing how easily it can deform, if not destroy us?

All I knew conclusively was this, pondering while pulling into the dark, half empty prison parking lot: when the wind curls toward the night it whispers of our need to escape the darkness. But it also whispers of a dire need for community and the blessings of a paperless god.

Finally, it was a Friday evening, a three day weekend, and I was looking forward to going back home in Seattle and relaxing until Monday with my wife and helping to take care of my mother and father. But it also was getting dark around 5PM now, and the rain was making travel more laborious than before. I decided to relax only a short while at the cabin before loading up the two dogs and driving two hours through the dark, rolling, wooded countryside of the north Olympic Peninsula, to the ferry terminal. I still preferred traveling without the radio blaring, giving me time to relax and pensively reflect on the ebb and flow of life's many movements.

Passing through coastal communities of Port Angeles, Sequim, and Blyn, the traffic was light, and I enjoyed the sense of solitude brought by driving long distances on the highway. I remembered that only a year before I would have found being alone without a radio as intolerable, but now I tended to find having it on an irritation.

Finally, after arriving at the ferry terminal in Bremerton, I had to stop and wait an hour, for it was late in the evening and fewer ferry runs were shuttling across the dark, frigid waters of the Pudget Sound.

So I leashed up Orion, who had sat next to me during the drive, and we ran along the sandy beach for a few minutes, where I was pleasantly surprised to see a cool but clear sky. Suka howled from the back of the truck as she saw us return to the truck. I did not enjoy putting her in the rear, but she had such a strong need to dominate other dogs around her that she would fight with Orion whenever they were together in a small space.

Finally, the flat, two storied, green and white ship arrived and all the patient passengers and vehicles were carefully loaded. Then it started to slowly plow majestically eastward through the calm, deep waters of night.

With winter at hand it was a frosty night, but I appreciated seeing the speckled stars of a clear sky as I began to walk about the open deck of the ship, still wanting more exercise and fresh air. The ferry rides were usually a welcome half hour diversion from sitting in a truck next to a drooling, usually begging to be scratched, wolf-dog. I paused to relax and leaned on the wooden railing of the upper deck to look carefully upward at the encircling night sky bright with numerous stars and a full moon. Below me the ocean had a bejeweled glow hanging on to its serene waters, with the reflected light of the moon dancing in the rhythmic flow of waves and the glimmer of stars piercing delicately through the dense and chilly air.

Breathing in deeply the mystic charm of the night, I tried to find the constellation Orion but the lights from nearby Seattle had canceled his usual appearance. Looking back from where the ferry had traveled through the tranquil water, a long and turbulent wake had been stirred up, leaving a lengthy trail bubbling behind the ship. Further behind, from where I had come, a dark silhouette of the Olympic Mountains could still be seen on the western horizon. In front of the ship only the surreal glow of urban lights

filled the sky on the eastern horizon.

Standing there on the ship's deck that I thought about the mythic context of what had been taking place for the past four months in my bi-weekly travels home. In some books that I had read a journey across a body of water meant that a spirit or soul traveled from one world to the next. Often times a spirit of the wild, usually an awesome looking creature waits for the deceased at these transition points. It was as though the soul must endure the judgment cast down by this creature before it can pass on safely. In my long bi-weekly drives I felt as though I had bypassed such a test, but that was not to say that there was no price to be paid for crossing this body of water. Call it cultural shock if you wish, but after leaving the remote log cabin and getting back into the city, it always seemed to take about twenty-four hours for me to settle down once back home. Perhaps it came from a feeling of up-rootedness, but I was best left alone until that time.

While walking along the wet planks of the large ferry I remembered from college that in Greek myths it was Cerberus, the dragon tailed dog that guarded the eternal river of Styx. It was a river that separated the world of the living from the underworld of the dead, which even the gods themselves respected so reverently that they would swear life binding oaths to its' name. The name of the grim ferryman who bravely transported souls across the hateful river was Charon, another fearful creature I felt fortunate to have missed on that night. Still standing on the upper deck, looking out across the abysmal waters of night, I saw that the ferry had been moving me regularly between two vastly different worlds. On the Peninsula I was living alone in a small wilderness cabin while working; on the east side of the Sound I stayed with my family in a large house, in a busy urban environment, and did not go to work. My life on one side of the Pudget

Sound was nearly the opposite from life on the other side, all clearly separated by a ferryboat ride across dark, turbulent waters. I felt as though I was participating in an ancient myth, working within the context of timeless tales that serve to enrich and deepen ones' sense of worldly experience, similar to seeing Orion standing boldly above my truck as I leave for work in the morning. Leaning on the wet railing, resting after my long drive, and reflecting on the potential magic of the night, I could feel curling softly on the white sleeve of the ocean breeze a myriad of ancient spirits that were still actively present and roaming the vast inner landscape of our lives.

Chapter break: serving IMU/Story?

Monk story: value of education (checking who was in imu, bringing them in, noise of chains, short pencils, difficulty of placement, having material for them, conversations, refusing, staying out of arm reach, wanting credit, depression, anger, wanting out, gang talk,)

Monday morning came quickly and I found myself walking down a bleak prison corridor to my new classroom, in Delta unit, to my new classroom for inmates who had been placed in segregation, youths who spent twenty-three hours everyday alone in a cell.

It was mid-sized room of about twenty by forty feet with a window on each of the two outside walls. Near the windows was a black metal structure containing a two metal seats with a writing shelf, separated by a small metal partition. The whole unit was screwed into the concrete wall behind it. On the floor beneath each of the two units was a metal clasp that I

soon to discover was to be used to chain the students into their desks.

”How did you end up here with these kids?” It was the same sergeant who had spoke to the teachers earlier in the year, carrying a large coffee mug, still reminding me of a crusty soldier’s supervisor in the Army.

”You know, I’m special. Special education that is. The school district is being hounded by lawyers threatening a law suit because these kids in the hole are not getting their education.” I spoke while pulling a long table toward the front of the room to use as a desk for myself.

”We should have the first of your kids here in a little bit. They’re getting him from the cell now.” Speaking while bringing his drink up to his face.

”It’ll be interesting to see how this works out. I’m getting work from the regular teachers to give to them, and then I’m suppose to help them out with it. So it shouldn’t be too difficult to handle.”

The sergeant took another drink from his oversized coffee mug and said,

”Well, just remember, this kids aren’t here for singing too loud at church choir. Do not take any crap. These kids are a high security risk so don’t give them any slack.”

Just then the lock on the large metal door behind us struck loudly, causing us to turn around and see two prison guards holding an inmate at the arms, who was walking between them wearing white overalls, shower slippers, and chains about the waist, wrists, and ankles.

As the guards reached me one spoke, “Samuelson refused. Are you going to

write him up?”

”Yeh, I guess I’m going to have to. That was what they told me to do, write a minor infraction.”

The two guards walked the inmate into the classroom, sat him down in one of the metal chairs, and promptly chained him into it. Each wrist was cuffed to a short chain that extended to a chain around his waist and each of his ankles were cuffed to short chains that were bolted to the floor.

Under those conditions I could quickly see that there was no way for him to reach out with his feet or arms. If I were struck, it would mean that I had gotten in too close. As guards were walking out of the room to get the second inmate I said a polite thank you, knowing what an extra burden on their time and energy having it was for them having to bring the inmates to the class. It would probably take a while for them to get use this new schedule.

Having recognized the inmate from seeing him in classes before, I said, ”How are you doing, Williams?” He was a tall, white boy, with greasy black curly hair, cut short and hanging over his forehead.

”I’m fine.” He spoke in a nonchalant manner, as though he had little to care about, the way a person speaks when just waking up in the morning.

Suddenly he blurted out, “Why do I have to come down here for?” There was more than a hint of irritation was in his voice.

”Well, even though you’re in segregation, the school district feels that you have a right to an education. So I am here.”

”But what if I don’t want to be here. Can’t I go back? I stayed up late last night talking to some other people in my pod.” He said with a sullen look.

Hearing this I knew that teaching to the segregation kids would not be very different than having the regular classes that I was doing before, except for having them chained up, which would make it easier to manage their behavior. Not being far from typical adolescents, they only cared about sleeping, eating, and visiting with friends.

Five minutes later that two guards came back with another chained up inmate walking in his white overalls between them. The student was one I had not seen much of before and did not know. He was a Hispanic teenager, about average height and weight, and walked in an exaggerated slouching, twisting motion, perhaps to embolden his image to others that saw him under such duress. As he got closer I could see the moist film of hurt in his eyes, but only a stone coldness was expressed by the look on his face.

It was still the face of a child that had not found manhood. Long straight hair hung down to his shoulders, the beginnings of a mustache appeared above his upper lip, and his dark eyes flashed out at me with a menacing gaze.

”Hernandez here did not want to go to school but once I told him that he’d get an infraction if he didn’t, he promptly changed his mind.” A small smile crossed the guard face while saying this, and the other guard grinned in agreement.

Hernandez was quickly chained up similar to Williams, on the small black metal chair just on the other side of the black partition that separated the two of them.

A look of frustration came to his face as the two guards left the room.

He grabbed one of the cuffs around a wrist, tried twisting it, and complained that it was too tight and hurt. Looking at the cuff I could only see that it was touching the skin on either side of the wrist bone.

Reaching out as far as possible he grabbed the short golf pencil I had put on his desk and pretended to be writing. It looked to me watching he had enough room, but he quickly complained in a loud voice, "How am I suppose to write like this?" He paused for a minute and then went on, "Man, they must really think we are violent criminals to be putting this stuff on us."

"Looks to me that you will do all right." I replied reassuringly, while handing him a short yellow "golf" pencil.

He went on, "This is not comfortable at all, and it hurts just to write.

They got this all messed up." Giving me a sharp, rebellious look.

"You will be here for only a hour and then you can sleep the rest of the day in your house." I spoke while leaning back against a long red counter that ran down one side of the classroom. It was a spot where I could stand off to one side, so they would not feel like I was boldly confronting them, and still be able to see the both of them, even though they were separated from each other by the metal partition.

Sensing that Hernandez was settling down Williams looked at me and said

in a calm, matter of fact tone of voice, “I really don’t see why we need to come here for school. I mean, we’re not going to get anything out of this. Man, I could be sleeping right now.”

”Maybe you are right, you might not get much out of this, it all depends on what you put into it. You know what that means.” Looking at Williams while saying this I could tell that he was willing to listen and discuss the matter with an open mind. He had been in the “hole” for a couple of months and had grown apathetic about the benefits of life.

”How much do you sleep everyday?” Curiosity struck sharply because I could see that he was still groggy and looked listless.

”Man, as much as I can. Probably about sixteen hours, maybe more. I don’t have a clock.”

”Well, if nothing else, coming to school should wake you up,” I said trying to humor the youths.

“Yeh, so we can better experience life in prison. Maybe you can teach me how to improve my ability at pissing off the guards.” Hernandez blurted out, looking at me defiantly, then he continued, “Just let me write a letter in class. I’ve got this old, homosexual guy that I’m writing to, you know softening up, and he sends me money.” He looked at Williams who was laughing at him, and then said, “Shut up Williams, how else am I going to get any money around here.”

Feeling the need to make an important point, I remembered a story that I felt could serve the moment well. It was the first day of class and what

better way to begin than with a story, I felt.

I turned to walk and stand directly in front of the youths to express my need to have their full attention, while saying, “Let me tell you my favorite story for showing the importance of education. I think you will like it.” Then I turned once again, walked to the table that I was using as a desk, turned and sat down facing the two chained up youths. They looked back at me with open eyes, prepared to listen, and I knew that I had a captive audience.

Grasping both hands to form a fist I began, “This is an old story that takes place in the days before the Communists took over China. For the lack of a better name I will call the main character in this story “Kim”.”

”Kim was a boy born into a large Chinese family of five children. They were a happy family for many years until one summer, during a long dry period that killed much of the crops, a famine struck the region, and many people found themselves suffering from a lack of food. Kim and his family were among those people. His father knew that they had enough food to feed only four of his children, but unfortunately, not all five of them.

”So the old man sold one of his kids for some extra cash, right?”

Hernandez spoke up quickly, softly chuckling to himself.

”No, but you are close.” I replied, and then went on with the story, saying, “Since Kim was the youngest in the family, and not strong enough to do much of the hard daily work to support the family, the father

decided that the only way to spare the life of his youngest child was to place him in a local monastery. He knew that the monks at this monastery would take good care of him and they would help him to grow up a strong and wise man.”

Williams suddenly spoke up sounding irritated, “You mean the old lady lets the old man just dump the little kid like that. Man, my mother would never do that. Even in prison she still says that I’m her kid.”

”That sounds good. I’m sure they loved their kids a lot, but remember that these were desperate times.” I said and then continued. “So when Kim arrived at this large, castle-like building full of mysterious looking monks who only wore long black robes, he was anxious to see what would happen to himself. His father walked little Kim slowly down a dark corridor to the master monk’s office.” I imitated a man walking slowly in the classroom, my arm stretched out as though holding the hand of a child, saying, “Once inside this office, the bald headed, over weight and elderly looking man who was in charge of all the other monks, looked down sternly at the small boy and said in a gruff and crude voice, “While you are here at my monastery you will do only what I have instructed you to do. Follow me and I will show you what I am expecting.” At this comment the master monk turned and walked briskly out a nearby door and stepped into a small garden behind his office. Once there he found a large bucket and scooped it full of water from a stone fountain that was standing in the center of the garden.”

”Man, if I were the kid I would have told that master monk a thing or two. Nobody talks to me like that!” Hernandez said.

”This was back in the old days in China. The kids listened to authority figures back then.” I said quickly, wanting to get back into the story. Suddenly Williams spoke, “Yeh, you had to listen or they would cut your head off!”

I continued the story before any more comments could be made, “After placing the bucket on the ground the master monk said, ‘You see what I have done? Now while standing over this bucket you,’ pointing to the small boy, ‘you are to do this!’ Raising his right hand over his head he abruptly brought it down hard upon the water bucket, slapping it with his open palm, splashing a small portion of water out of it. This he continued to do three or four times before stopping to look once again at the small boy, who was standing beside him, looking confused.”

I returned to sit on my table, turned to face the both of them squarely. Pausing of a slight moment I wanted to emphasize the next what I was to say next, “The master mink looked at the boy and said, “ ‘Once you have slapped all the water out of the bucket, I want you to re-fill it again with water, and return to slapping until the water is gone. Continue to do this everyday, all day, until I am satisfied that you have learned it well.’”

Hernandez spoke up abruptly, excitedly, while grabbing the front of the desk, causing his to swing and clang loudly as they hit the metal

partition beside him. “Man, that old man is nuts. I would of slapped him!”

I went on before Williams could say anything, “Kim stood there dumbfounded by what he was told to do by this mysterious man who called himself the “Grand Monk” of the monastery. But he had no choice, because it was then that he saw his father quickly walking away, abandoning him to this strange and bizarre place.”

Here I paused for a moment to see if the idea of a child being abandoned by its’ own family would have an effect on them. The two boys only sat quietly waiting for me to continue.

Seeing the desired effect in their eyes I slowly stood up and walked toward the long counter and said, “The Grand Monk was not a man who was easily satisfied because it was close to a year later, Kim’s first birthday at the monastery had arrived, and he was still slapping water out of the bucket, re-filling it, and slapping more water all day long.

Besides getting water logged hands, Kim felt upset over his situation, as I am sure you could well imagine. He just wanted to be like the other kids and have fun in life; he wanted some freedom back. This business of slapping water all day was humiliating and senseless.”

Blurting out suddenly, Hernandez said, “I got it! This is going to be one of those Kung Fu stories, right? He is going to go out and kill off the enemy, and save a town or something, right? No, no, the King’s daughter, he is going to save the King’s daughter from some evil dude.”

I responded, “Take a deep breath Hernandez. You have seen too many

movies. Just listen, please.” Then I went on, “Finally the Grand Monk approached him and said, ‘Kim, you have been a good student and now it is your birthday. Go back to your home for the day and entertain yourself with your family and friends. It will take your mind off your anger and frustration. I will see you back here later this evening.’” He said this while smiling at the boy, giving Kim his first real sense that the man liked and cared about him.”

I paused for a moment to look out the window and saw several guards from various parts of the prison all running across the open courtyard and converging on Bravo Unit. I knew there was another fight going on and more guards would soon be arriving there to join them. Fortunately my two students were still facing me and not seeing the action outside. I went on before they had a chance to notice it.

”It only took a couple of hours for Kim to walk home, and when he got there his whole family and all of his friends from the neighborhood rejoiced to see him looking so strong and well. Knowing it was his birthday, they quickly set up a variety of food, drinks, and gifts on a thick, massive, wooden picnic table in the yard, in front of his parents home.”

”What about the girls? Weren’t there any girls there? Man, this kid has been down for a year now. He needs to be checking out the babes.” said Hernandez while stretching out as much as possible at his desk.

I replied, “Sure there were girls there. What kind of neighborhoods do

you think they got in China?” I spoke a bit self-righteously, trying to humor them, and then I continued, “sitting around the table, eating rice, chicken, pork, and fruit, they began to drill Kim full of questions concerning his life at the monastery. Finally one boy, the same young age as him, asked the wrong question, “Tell me Kim, what do you do at the monastery?”

”Kim’s mind flashed back to the past year and the anger and frustration of having to splash water continuously from out of the water bucket, along day long, for each day for nearly a year.”

I walked and stopped directly in front of the two youths and moved one of my arms high into the air as I spoke more loudly than before, “no longer able to control his rising sense of rage, he raised his hand over his head in the same manner as though splashing water, and quickly brought it down upon the thick, heavily wooded picnic table, smashing it into a thousand small pieces that went flying through the air, as though it was struck by a cannon ball.” At this point I slammed my raised hand into the palm of my other hand, causing a dull smack of a sound.

Seeing that the students were still listening well to the story I returned to my table, sat on it facing them, and was prepared to tell the grand finale of the tale.

”Shock and a deep sense of awe electrified his friends and family, especially the girls. Even Kim was surprised to find himself in possession of such strength and skill. In those peoples’ eyes he no

longer was the small boy who had to leave his desperate family, but rather they saw him as a great and talented warrior who came from the local monastery. He was one who had learned well from the master monk, even though he did not know that he was learning anything at all.”

Williams spoke, leaning forward in his small metal desk, “This is like that movie, “Karate Kid”. You know, ‘wax on, wax off’.”

”You’re right. It ‘s not that different at all. But the point is you generally don’t know the things you are learning in life until something happens and you have to act. Education is a very subtle process, it’s not just doing well at tests. As long as you maintain a strong focus in life, you will have the needed inner strength to succeed. To be what you want to be.”

I looked at them carefully to see if they were still with and understanding me. I felt awkward trying to explain the moral of the story, as though I was preaching not teaching, and was hoping they would fill in the missing parts.

Trying to apply the best educational twist to the moral of the story that I could, I said, “Learning how to fully focus on things is the most important skill one can learn in life. Being able to see clearly, listening carefully, and thinking about things completely, are very basic and important skills. These are the things an education can give to you if you are willing to learn. It is a way of becoming more fully alive and present in your life. It is a way of becoming more aware of yourself and

the world around you. But like Kim, he had to learn that to maintain that strong focus he had to sacrifice all those entertaining distractions that people enjoy so much. He had to focus only on what was directly in front of him, which was nothing more than a bucket of water. But that was the thing that taught him so much.”

”Did you seeing that movie, “Karate Kid? Man, that one guy really got tore up in a fight.” Williams wanted to start his own discussion and I decided to cut it short.

”Williams, tell me what you want out of an education.”

He paused for a moment to reflect and then said blankly, “Money and more money. And then maybe some girls.” He finished with a dry laugh.

I knew that much of what he had said was only a cover. Many of the youths felt that if they were seen taking school seriously their peers would tease them for it. But I had a point to be made and I was not going to let anyone stop me. Not after having made it this far.

”This is how I see education. A good education should be able to teach you about the hidden potential that lies within things, especially within yourself. It is a process that can draw you closer to the center of things where strength and knowledge builds the character needed for true success in life.” I stop to see if my two students were understanding, listening very well. I knew then that I was losing them. I went on, “and of course, as we all know, this is the best way to find girls. O.K? So lets’ start today with some math worksheets.”

Needless to say the rest of the day and the ones that followed were spent working on math, writing skills, and issues related to geography and current events. Most of the youths I saw in class seemed to prefer it over spending time alone in their small six by twelve foot cells, the size of an average bathroom. The talks that we had were generally constructive, sometimes personal, other times concerning life at prison, but it all seemed decompress the emotional burden they were bearing. It was a way to remedy or counteract the psychological drain isolation has on a youthful mind; a drain I could only imagine. Most had not been in a class for a couple of months, and they needed to make that transition from solitary confinement back to schooling.

Seeing them chained into their chairs I felt forced them to take their situation in the classroom more seriously. They did not seem to be playing around as much as I had seen them do before, while they were in the regular classrooms. Though it tended to be uncomfortable, especially having to struggle with the chains and cuffs while reading and writing, it did serve to “keep them in check”, as the inmates would call it. Boy, this would be the dream of every middle school teacher.

Chapter Break

It was in the late evening, a couple of weeks later, that a strong storm came hurling off the northern Pacific like a screaming banshee that had taken ghostly possession of a windmill, and consequentially began to blow fir trees down like matchsticks, all across the region. The Victoria

radio station I was listening to called for a winter storm alert and at the same time I could hear it happening in the breaking and falling of tree limbs surrounding the cabin. Fortunately, there were none close enough to damage the my dwelling, but when my kitchen light began to flicker, I could tell that electricity may soon become a thing of the past. And for me that would mean no electric heat, hot water, refrigerator, microwave, lights, computer, or videos. At least there would be no problem with my water supply because it was gravity fed by the mountain stream; most people have wells that use an electric pump, which does not work in a power outage.

It was around 8:30PM, I had been listening to the strong winds pound repeatedly on my cabin roof like heavy fists from the sky, beating to test its' structural strength and integrity. Even the windows were being challenged by the storm. Sitting alone, watching the tumultuous behavior among the trees, I could hear the strain on the windows every time a sudden gust of wind fall upon them like wolves upon sheep. At any moment either a falling limb or a too strong a shove from the storm could break one wide open.

Expecting to lose power at any moment I had the cookstove blazing red hot from the fire of three small logs. This alone would supply me with all the needed heat for the rest of the evening. On the black, flat cooking space of the cookstove, I placed a plate sized, metal camping pan and filled it with horse chestnuts that had been stored in the upper bread

bins of the stove. Once browned I knew these would taste delicious. A small space heater was waiting to be used next to my chair, but with the storm raging, I decided to leave it alone. Rummaging through various drawers throughout the cabin, I salvaged four candles for later use. The largest one I put next to the chair I would be sitting for the rest of the evening, while the others were strategically placed as needed throughout the dwelling.

It was soon thereafter that the inevitable happened. The kitchen light flickered several times and then blacked out. Only the darkness of night and forest pervaded the cabin. I quickly lit the four strategically placed candles, threw another log on the fire, put the now browned horse chestnuts into a bowl, grabbed a large beer, crawled into the old sleeping bag, zipped it up to my groin, and sat down in my rocking chair to do some inspirational, creative writing. I suddenly felt an urge to do poetry.

The twilight glow from the candles within the old, log structure of the cabin, with the still pounding of the stormy winds, all blended into an evening of mystical enchantment and charm. Orion and Suka slept on the floor nearby, occasionally lifting a head to gauge the strength and direction of the passing tempest, while Kitty slept peacefully on my lap. I began to write by jotting down in a spiral notebook anything that crept into the dim light of my mind: "Darkness is our romance". "As prey we avoid the night". "Within the loose, wind swept sand - night arrives at my doorstep, searching through windows, listening in the wooden hallways".

”Seedlings stir within the soil - anxious movements rising in the night, as a dream soaked universe lays itself bare to a feathered desire for nightly arrivals”. “The wind and a shifting darkness has hardened the people in their struggle to climb above a delirious, wet wall of rain”.

”Nature builds the twilight only to succumb to its’ wandering stars”.

Then, after finishing the twenty ounce can of beer, “The wind stumbles and falls upon my roof like a drunken demon”. Playing with a variety of ideas, sounds, and concepts while sitting in the candle lit darkness, warmed only by a small fire, I enjoyed the evening. Though many raw and perhaps twisted ideas stormed their way into my mind on that windswept night, no lasting and complete poems were created. But it was well worth the try. Storms can be quite inspirational.

As the hour approached 10PM, I began to hear less of the gusting wind yet in its’ place was the pattering of a heavy rainfall, one that surely would continue through the night. Taking one at a time the two dogs, who now were napping indoors, by their collars, I lead them outside to the porch, leashed them up, gave them food and water near their nightly beds.

Standing there looking out toward the front yard, I could see the thickness of the rain sifting through the sky, as it fall through the strong porch light that spread out into the surrounding darkness. Looking more closely, then reaching out with my hand into the air, I saw small crystals of snow landing on my open palm. Snow had begun to mix in and fall with the rain. As the night dragged on it will only get colder and

by early morning much of the rain probably will have turned into and become snow. That certainly will make for an icy road beneath a layer of fresh snow, and the morning drive to work will become a messy affair. The prattle of rain could be heard pounding more loudly than before on the thin bedroom roof, as I blew out the white candle, curled and tucked myself comfortably under two thick woolen blankets. My mind leaped back to the sound of the buffeting wind that was so alive earlier in the evening, and how it slowly ceased, giving way to a heavy rainfall. I could feel that by being in the cabin it was easy to study the movements of nature, especially storms, by living so close to it. I remembered an ancient Taoist saying, "Let Nature be your only authority". Laying there in the darkness, still smelling the tallow from the once lit candle, I wondered how it could be any different. How could it be that people tried to live in ways that were outside of nature? That would be like a rain drop trying to escape the world of rain.

Wanting to rolling over I could feel the small body of Kitty balled up and dozing at the end of the bed. Wanting to not disturb her, I pulled my legs up toward my chest and then rolled to rest on one side. It felt warmer when I curled up into a fetal-like position. The heavy pattering of rain continued on the roof, while I thought of the arrival of snow near morning, and then I fell quickly into a deep, dream filled sleep.

It was still dark when I woke up and saw the yellow lights of my digital

clock staring back at me: 4:05AM. I drew the two heavy wool blankets in more tightly while lying on one side and curled my legs up. Then I noticed the intensity of the rain battering the roof of the bedroom. It was as though someone had a large bucket of marbles and was continuously dumping them, if not throwing them out across the thin roof. That must be the source of my mild headache, I reflected. Even in my sleep, the sound of the rain drove my brain to despair. Suddenly a gust of wind could be heard starting in the distant forest, and it resembled the sound of a bowling ball hurling down a smooth wooden alley; but this wind was sliding through the forest, heading straight for the cabin. The trees began to scream, branches cracking and lashing about like kelp dancing in a stormy sea; just as the giant wave of wind reached the building I could sense its' horrific strength and majesty. With a quick prayer I hoped the cabin would survive the blow, and then it hit. The monstrous wall of wind and rain tore at every inch of the structure, shaking it to the foundation. Even in the darkness of the enclosed bedroom I could feel several breezes passing through the night air. The wind has found its' way through cracks in the log walls and entered my dark chamber as though to say there was no escaping its' power and authority.

I rolled over onto my other side and again pulled the blankets tightly about me. The rain continued to pound demonically at the roof and to the south the wind appeared to be re-grouping its' elite forces for another assault. Closing my eyes and burying my head deeper into the pillow, I

knew on that night only sleep would be sweeping me away; but it would be a restless slumber containing an assortment of unearthly dreams.

When my cordless telephone in the kitchen rang loud and sharply at 6AM, waking me up, forcing me out of a warm bed and into the cold cabin, I knew that the electricity had come back during the night.

”How does it look over at your place?” I quickly identified the voice of Mr. LaPush, my supervisor.

It was definitely dark both inside and outside of the cabin, so I abruptly turned on the porch light, then stuck my head outside to see thickly snow falling, with a foot of it starkly covering the ground.

”Well, it looks pretty thick out here.”

Frank went on, “Do you think you can make it to work on time?”

”That depends on when they get the road graders out here. There must be nearly two feet of snow on the ground.” I exaggerated cautiously.

”Ted said he can not even make it out of his driveway, so take a couple of hours and hopefully I’ll see you around 10 AM at work. I want to meet with you later this afternoon. OK?” He sounded friendly in a matter of fact way, and I knew he was also being careful so no one got hurt trying to make it into work.

After hanging up the phone I quickly walked stocking-foot through the darkened cabin, back to my bed, which had cooled off by now, curled up into a ball, and promptly fell into a renewed slumber.

As the hour approached 8AM I slowly woke up, looked out the bedroom window and decided it was time to crawl out of bed. The cold air of night was still present in the cabin, so I quickly grabbed a couple of logs next to the wood stove and started a fire. A puff of white smoke appeared when I blew outward, checking the temperature inside. It was then that I pulled up the shade on the large kitchen window and saw the white, fluffy garment of winter covering the surrounding forest, making it all look fabulous, much like a fur coat worn by a Hollywood actress. The fir trees carried nearly four inches on each of their countless branches, and the ground had nearly five inches of the purist snow imaginable. A faint wind was seen blowing a wisp of white powder off a fir tree directly in front of the cabin, and a small black squirrel hurriedly ran down one tree over to and up another one. Once it climb to branch level it scurried out on a thin limb to look about, causing a minor avalanche of snow to fall from it.

Seeing that I still had an hour left before I needed to leave for work I unclasped the two dogs and let them frolic in the snow. Like bullets they ran off, first to the neighbors' house to confront their dogs, but with me calling them back they returned to the yard and rejoice in the thick layer of heavens' finest laying on the ground. Suka quickly stretched out as though she would swim through the drifts of snow and began to roll around in it with her legs reaching up toward the sky. Squirming back and forth,

making sure that she did not miss any section of her back rubbing into the cold wetness, she continued like a fish out of water to flounder on the ground until the novelty of it worn off. Orion did much the same, except he did not need so much of the snow to get a feel for it. He squirmed around on it once and then quit, assuming a prone position with his ears up, listening for signs of prey. Seeing this I knew that he could be trusted off the leash only for a short while before returning to it. Once back home from work we would have a good long walk together, off the leash.

Looking upward I could see that the sky had occasional pools of blue splashed across its mostly cloudy and breezy canvas. The surrounding forest looked unearthly, being dressed in pure whiteness, and the rest of the trees stood regal beneath the snow that appeared to be five inches deep, measured visually by the crust of it capping the roof of my truck. Listening to the unusual silence of the highway nearby I knew that travel anywhere would be haphazard at best. With the rain of the passing night having frozen by now, and the thick layer of snow having fallen on top of that, most folks were obviously staying home, waiting for the roads to thaw out by the afternoon.

Knowing that the roads would be difficult, I decided to leave around 9AM, giving me an hour, or twice as much time as normal, of road time to drive to work. So after putting the dogs back on their leashes and saying my

good byes I climbed into my truck, quickly backed out the driveway, so the tires would not sink deeply into the soft snow and get stuck, which could easily had been done not having snow tires installed.

Once on the road, I put the truck into 4 wheel drive and began a cautious drive to Clallam Bay. I soon discovered a lay of ice coated the narrow road, and any degree of speed would be impossible due to the fact that the truck was sliding most of the time as it was. Thinking about the steep embankments along side of the road that I would have to pass further ahead, ones' that fell 50 feet straight into a rushing river, I debated whether I should cancel the trip, return to the cabin, and call in saying that it was too dangerous to drive to work. Other people had been killed serving off the road and crashing into the river on much better days. But the thought of canceling the trip did not last long, the sense of duty to work prevailed, and I continued swinging and swaying down the icy road, doing everything I could to keep it between the shoulders of the road, feeling that being in 4 wheel drive the truck was fish-tailing more than it should.

Never had I experienced such a white knuckle drive than I did on that snowy morning. Much of the road over Burnt Mountain had no shoulders on it, only a steep bank leading straight down into a turbulent river.

Keeping a constant speed of only 20 miles per hour, so I could always stop within a few feet if needed, the drive was nothing more than a controlled, or not so controlled, slide all the way into town.

”Hope the drive in was not too bad.” Frank said.

”Depends on how use you are to icy roads. If I was in the Boy Scouts, I would of got a merit badge for what I did this morning.” I responded sarcastically.

”I got a letter here for you.” He had just pulled it out from a desk draw.

“It is a deposition from the lawyers who are now suing the school district. They think we should be giving the kids in the hole more time in class and more time with the regular teachers. In other words, just because these kids are a threat to peoples safety, they should not be denied an education. Any ways, they want to ask you some questions. Read the letter, bring your school records, and be prepared to be grilled.

They are going to look for anything and everything to use against us that they can. The more dirt they can find, the better their chances of giving money out of the state.” He threw the envelope on his desktop like it was a cold, dead fish needing to be tossed in the garbage.

Reading from the letter I said, “They say that they want copies of all documents relating to the education of our kids in IMU. That’s a lot of stuff to be copying.”

”Well, get to work. The district office down town is copying a bunch of stuff for the lawyers too.”

After work that same day, I stopped at the library in Clallam Bay to look for and pick up a couple of old but classic videos. Parking on the small,

gently sloping parking lot, I walked into the library to find two or three people milling about the book stacks, and the librarian sitting behind the large desk in the middle of the building.

”I’ve plenty of snow storms back in North Dakota, but what happened last night must of been an ice storm! It was like driving on an ice skating rink this morning.” Declaring as I walked past the central desk.

The librarian responded, “I had to pour hot water on the door of my car just to melt the ice and get it open. The streets were pretty well sanded by the time I came to work though. But I know how treacherous these county roads can be, especially after it freezes. I just hope if I go over an embankment and get stuck down below the road in one of those twenty foot ditches, that the car lights stay on so hopefully someone passing by will be able to see me.”

Thinking for a minute I said, “I always see three little crosses on the side of the road about halfway across Burnt Mountain; what they for?”

The librarian looked up to ponder for a moment and then respond, “A couple of years ago the community lost three teenage girls who were driving on the road and then for some reason they lost control of the car, went over the edge, and down into the river. For a small town like ours, it was a big loss.”

”I suppose the kids at school took it especially hard. Teenagers like to believe that they are invulnerable to such mortal tragedies.”

She looked directly at me while thinking of something that narrowly

escaped her mind, “Well, if I’m right, I believe it was some high school friends that put those crosses out there on the road, and they help to maintain them with flowers.”

I ended the conversation with a comment about the fragility of life, even for the young, and then went in search of a good video for what certainly would be a cold and frosty evening at home. I was always pleasantly surprised by the variety such a small library could have in way of videos.

Though the old, classic, cowboy movies were absent, I did manage to find a four part series on the Shackleton Expedition. It was an attempt to cross Antarctic, but it ended with the captain and a few others having to take a treacherous boat voyage across thousands of miles of incredibly rough seas in the south Atlantic Ocean, seeking rescue for themselves and their stranded crew. It would make my early morning drive look like a piece of cake.

As I got back into my truck and began to drive out of the library parking lot I soon realized that the icy pavement was senselessly spinning the rear tires, preventing me from leaving. Again and again, I tried in vain to simply drive up a barely noticeable slope in order to get back on the well sanded street. Soon an elderly patron from the library, presumably hearing the noise from my truck came out to assist me.

”Put it in 4 wheel drive!” He shouted over the roar of the rear tire spinning, digging a hole through the ice.

”It is in 4 wheel drive!” I cried back.

”That means that it does not work, because only one wheel back here is turning.” He was bent over forwards, at the rear of the truck, looking carefully at the single tire in motion.

”And another problem is that you do not have any tread on those tires of yours. Looks like you have been driving around for a month on bald tread.”

That would explain why the rear of the truck was fishtailing like it did earlier that morning coming to work. I obviously had not been caring for my truck enough to be ready for the snow and ice of the Pacific Northwest, especially for living in a remote area.

It was an important lesson to be learned: take care of the truck and it will take of you. I could easily had been killed that morning, either by sliding off the road and rolling down a steep slope into the river or by having a head-on collision.

The returning drive home was safe and relaxing, the roads in the countryside had all been sanded well during the day, and the afternoon sun had thawed much of the ice. I passed a couple of cars that were abandoned, sitting on the edge of the shoulder of the road. Passing over Burnt Mountain the change in altitude was obvious; the icy landscape of the lower areas changed into a thick, snowy landscape toward the top of the mountain. The trees were still dressed in their winter white finery and looked angelic. Road-graders had curved a wide swath along the course of the highway, leaving four foot embankments of snow on its’ shoulders. Seeing such drastic changes in seasons, occurring so quickly and

unexpectedly, I sat in a quiet amazement during that cautious drive home. Arriving at the cabin the dogs starting their whining, barking, and pulling feverishly at their long chains, wanting to charge into the snowy landscape like spirits chasing through a nightly dream. Dashing in doors and stepping gingerly over the cat, I changed into the usual sweat clothes, plus adding a pair of gaiters for covering the boots tops while walking through the deep snow.

All this while the theme song from “Fiddler on the Roof” kept playing and repeatedly in my mind as I unleashed the dogs and started to head out for an evening hiking. I even began to whistle the tune, over and again, while the lyrics circled around like a stuck record among my thoughts.

“If I were a rich man,
Ya ha deedle deedle, bubba bubba deedle deedle dum.

All day long I’d biddy biddy bum.

If I were a wealthy man.”

While only beginning to follow the river edged trail I discovered that walking through the foot deep snow was no easy task and that my usual hike of three miles would be cut in half. I simply was not ready for the constant high stepping motion needed for walking in the snow. But even with that thought in my mind, I found the wintry nature of the forest

enchanting. There was something so fresh, pure, and unearthly about the white, fleecy woods; it transcended mortal concerns with its' own splendor. And with the full and turbulent river winding through the unending trees, it made for a timeless, picture post card perfection.

I had finished viewing the first hour of the Shackleton videos, where the ship had gotten stuck in an ice field, while consuming a bowl of roasted chest nuts and emptying a glass of ruby port wine, both having served to warm my cold stomach. The dogs, who had been eating some of the chest nuts with me, now were starting to wrestle with one another, a sign that they were getting restless and wanting out. After turning on the porch light, I grabbed Suka by the collar first, for had she ran quickly to the door when I got up, being the most anxious to leave. I took her outside, leashed her up at the front of the porch, and then refilling her food and water bowls. Returning inside Orion was standing anxiously by the door, waiting to also be taken outside and bedded down for the night, so I did so. Before turning around to collect an armful of firewood, I looked out of the front of the cabin and into the encircling forest. With the cushioning layer of snow still adorning the innumerable trees and land, I could feel a sense of magical wonderment from the night. Walking out into the driveway I gazed upward to see one of the clearest starry skies I had ever seen. It was as though a thick layer of salt had been tossed across a sheet of black velvet. There was Orion standing boldly in the southern sky, the Big Dipper was still pointing northward, the Northern Cross

directly above and guarding the cabin, all passing supremely quiet through the eternal night. Snowy silence and stillness firmly enveloped the crystalline landscape. When I returned to the porch I could see through the light a steady stream of large, fluffy flakes descending from a mildly, curling breeze, upon the cold, crusty mantle of snow that enshrouded the sleeping earth. I could see it slowly piling higher, perhaps another foot of accumulation by early morning. Compared to the forest I had known during the late summer and fall of the year, what I saw now laying before me seemed to be a sleepy form of death that had descended upon the forest. But a form of death that brought with it a feeling of magic, or a deep sense of spirituality. It all made me wonder, what was this white night of celestial proportions? Death, sleep, or something much more?

Standing there on the porch, looking out at the night, the earlier song came back to mind and I started to whistle it: "If I were a rich man". But before I got beyond the first line the sound of an owl boomed from the woods and I stopped. Suddenly it hooted out again, but this time closer, or perhaps it had only called more loudly, I could not tell. Straining my ears to detect its' location, I stood there in the night frozen, focused only on listening for more of it, but only seeing the snow drift steadily through the yellow glow of the porch light. That wilderness sound never was heard again while I stood there for a few minutes waiting for it, on that icy still night.

Eventually, I withdrew back into the cabin, refilled Kitty's meal bowl, and then retired to the warmth of my welcoming bed. For it was there that I realized, shortly before drifting off into a deep slumber, how much the night was like a dream and a meditation, whose only reality may be found in the sound of a passing owl.

Chapter Break

Legal Deposition: two lawyers, man & woman, (blonde male, athletic, bearded & dark hair white woman, glasses) young, hard headed, aggressive, calculating, devious, tricky, out to destroy, detail-oriented, white college types, court typist (elderly black woman), district lawyer (young Asian man), department of corrections lawyer (young white, fat man), office of the superintendent of public instruction lawyer (middle aged white woman), Seattle office, 20th floor (scared of heights, chair next to the window, concrete jungle, sea of tarred roof tops, congested traffic, rainy day, fake politeness, cut throat legal maneuverings, charges of harassment, 8AM to 5PM, to be continued later, "Seattle, a great place for a cup of coffee."

The butterflies were swarming in my stomach as I push the elevator bottom in the large, thirty-some story tall building in downtown Seattle. The lawyer for the school district told me her office was on the twenty-first floor, to meet her there at 8:30AM, because the deposition I was to give would take place at 9AM, in a nearby room. It had been nearly two years since I had been up over four stories in a building, and even that made me

nervous. Something about being elevated in tall buildings always seemed to push my anxiety button. The fear can hit me so hard I practically get sick. And then having to be drilled by lawyers seeking ammunition for their law suit against the school district, lawyers trying to destroy educators working in prison, what a target.

”Why don’t you sit over here, next to the window so you can get some sunlight?” The lawyer for the school district was a young man of Asian descent, polite and sensitive looking. But there was a determined look in his face and I could tell that he could be difficult if he wanted to be, perhaps an acquired trait from working in the courts of law.

I stood in the conference room which had an average sized mahogany-like table in the middle and about ten chairs surrounding it. I had not yet made up my mind where I wanted to sit. Being twenty some stories up, I had not even decided that I was going to stay, only wanting to wait for awhile and see what my nervous system was going to do. Looking carefully outside an endless sea of concrete and black tar covered roof top stretched out to the horizon, where Interstate 5 weaved its’ way being clogged with morning commuter traffic. Rain clouds were beginning to huddle across the sky and whatever sunlight existed was slowly being consumed by dark clouds. Surveying this scene, a sudden longing for the forest grew within me.

”That may be all right, so I can keep my back to the window and not be sightseeing while these barracuda lawyers are grilling me.” Saying with a

lengthy exhale, still trying to relax.

”Always remember, do not say anything that is not actual, well known fact. These lawyers will try to get your opinion and ideas on things to use against you and the school district. If you do not know for certain, do not say anything. And do not be trying to make friends with them.” The district lawyer was eyeing me carefully, making sure that I clearly understood, but also making me even more nervous.

”How long is this going to take? My wife wants me back home in a couple of hours to help with my mom and dad.” I said ruefully.

”I do not know. Lets wait until the others get here and then we can ask.”

”Let me ask you a question. I’m not sure if I understand why the school district is being sued. Nobody at school has seen the actual law suit. So what is going on here?”

”Washington Legal is an advocacy organization that gets money from organizations and private funds for certain causes. They do a lot of suing against the prisons because it makes them popular with the liberal crowd, plus it is a state agency where they can make a lot of money if they win. This has nothing to do with the kids, the teachers, or the school. This is all about money. So do not take anything here personally.” There was a deeply sincere look on his face as he said this, making me believe him. Then I thought to myself, “just a good lawyer.”

The court reporter soon arrived, began to plug in her tape recorder, laptop computer, and keyboard, all at the end of the table. She was an

elderly black woman, who looked like the building could start collapsing and not be distracted by it.

Soon two lawyers, a man and a woman both in their thirties, from Washington Legal appeared in the doorway. Knowing the routine, they walked deliberately into the briefing room, both holding on to thick brief cases, wearing plain if not casual clothing, eyeglasses, short, neat hairstyles, and looking like they had just wormed their way out of a local library.

Holding out his hand for me to shake the man spoke first, “You must be Mark Cole. My name is Phil Slogan. How are you doing today?” With a formal if not patronizing air, he quickly reminded me of a college student who would prefer preparing a political campaign for student government rather than go out roaming the clubs at night with his friends. I almost wanted to ask him a pointed question concerning the political correctness of prompting prison inmates to file an expensive law suit against a small, rural school district, just to keep himself employed, but stopped myself. For the moment it was an issue not worth contemplating; my energies would be better spent on defending myself and the high school.

”Fine,” I said, not knowing what else to say to a legal opponent.

”Hello, my name is Fay Cummins,” the woman lawyer approached me and held out her hand, which I promptly clasped softly. She had raven dark hair, black rimmed glasses, navy blue colored clothes, and little if any makeup.

There was a strong air of self-confidence in the look she gave me, like a bobcat about to swoop down on an unsuspecting raccoon.

"I guess you already know my name." I paused for a minute. "How long will this take?"

"I'm looking at an all day session. There is a lot of material that I feel needs to be covered. Your teaching position at the prison puts you right in the middle of some very important issues." She stopped to take a look at her law partner and then went on, "I hope you are ready for it."

With the school district lawyer sitting by my side, ready to communicate and advise me by means of various looks, gestures, or a swift kick in the shins, and the court stenographer having prepared to type down everything that was said in the room, the lawyers questioning began.

Fay, sternly sitting straight across the table from me, started to rummage through a thick pile of notes, stopped and then looked squarely at me as though reading from a page, "Have you reviewed any documents in preparation for this deposition?"

"Only what I brought with me, that you can see on the table." I said flatly, looking straight back at her.

Holding up a document she said, "What is this?"

"My teaching certificate." I responded automatically, wondering where this would lead.

"Can you describe generally what it means?" She looked and spoke to me in a very programmed tone of voice, as though she was giving instructions

through a microphone to a detached, distant audience.

Feeling like she merely wanted to jerk my chain with these simple minded questions I started to answer also in a mechanical tone of voice, “It is the initial teacher certificate. It gives me endorsements in special education and art.”

”Tell me where you work.” Speaking the question while also looking down at some papers, looking for her next question.

”Clallam Bay Correctional Center, teaching youths who have been assigned to the intensive management unit.” I said wondering if she was even listening, because she was still searching through her notes.

Suddenly her legal companion leaned over and whispered to her. She then looked further at her notes and quickly asked, “How do you know whether an inmate has been assigned to the IMU?”

Thinking that they were trying to sink their hooks into the way I conduct daily business, I replied, “I talk to the guards everyday in D unit, and I also read the white board that has the names of IMU inmates listed on it.”

Quickly she responded, looking at me like I was a gold fish inside of a small glass bowl, “Other than that, are there any other ways that you can know about the location of inmates.”

”No.” I said.

”Do you ever give one-on-one instruction to non-special education kids in the IMU?” This time I thought she was looking at me as though I was a monkey inside of a cage.

”Only when the numbers are low, and there is a student available.”

”So you think that might happen?” she said.

”There’s no plans for it right now.” The idea of an elaborate game of chess came to my mind, and she was trying to move her pieces so to eliminate my queen and then quickly put my king in check. She was going to fake a threatening blow from the right and then smash me from the left.

”How many kids do you have in IMU?”

”I think there may be about seven, it changes quickly.” Somehow the truth will vindicate me, just stick to the truth, I thought, besides that is what my boss told me to do.

”Do you see all those kids everyday in the classroom?” Again she looked at me like I was floating belly up in a bowl of water, stuck behind a pane of glass.

After pausing to think for a minute I said, “I can not right now because we are still waiting for more waist chains. I can only get two students at a time for each period.”

”How do you determine whether the time is used for one-on-one instruction or group?”

”If there are needs that require one-on-one, like speech for example, and I have the opportunity to do it, then I do it.” This woman can not see the forest for the trees, I thought. Her mind must run by the power of details, not being able to understand any of the larger concepts of life, like humanity and compassion.

”So you give one-on-one to special education students, and one-on-one to non-special education students, and then group instruction. Is that correct?” She said this very confidently, while bending toward and looking at her legal partner. They whispered again for a moment.

”Yes.” I spoke, though I knew she was not listening.

”How do you prioritize what it is that you do?”

”I see the special education kids first.” Details, details! This lady is going to drive me crazy with her need for details. What sense was all this? My body began to slump forward in the chair.

”How do you determine whether someone gets into your first period or second period class?” She continued to speak every question in a flat tone of voice, making sure that I felt smaller, more goldfish-like every moment.

”Sometimes it depends on if they are able to get along with each other, or maybe someone asked to come to class later in the day, or if someone has a call-out or needs to go to their yard. I have to be flexible.” I was beginning to feel emotionally trapped, squirming with a sharp hook in my mouth.

”What if they have a question in class that you can not answer? What do you do then?”

”Usually we can work it out together. I know what the teachers are assigning, so it is not anything unfamiliar to me.” The truth! Speak it, stick to it, and it shall make you free - I hoped.

“Are you able to get through the entire lesson for a student in one period?”

”Only if they are paying attention.” Finally I decided to give up trying to understand the situation, of what her goals were, and why she was asking so many classroom questions. She knew the law and was going to try to use it to discredit the high school.

”So you feel that you could teach in a single period a full day’s worth of education?”

”I’d sure try.”

This cold bantering back and forth went on all day, until around five o’clock in the afternoon the lawyer for the school district said that the proceedings needed to stop because I was becoming mentally exhausted. She felt this was obvious because I no longer cared what I was saying, and was just blurting out any retort to their caustic questions that came to my mind, anything that seemed to sound good to me, that is.

”You did good. They were trying to get you to say nasty things about the school district or about prison policies, but you hung in there pretty well.” The District lawyer said walking with me to the office lobby, also looking tired from the litigious day.

”I just can not believe it. The teachers at the prison have worked so hard to help those kids to turn their lives around, and these lawyers want to harass us, even destroy the school, all for their own financial gains.

How morbid can you get.” I left the building and drove home exhausted and

bitter, thinking that not a single question was asked about the gains students had made at the school.

Chapter Break

In discolored, off-white overalls Max sat next to the concrete back wall, chained to the black metal chair and the floor, where he was twisted around at the waist to look out a mist covered window behind him. Being the last period of the day I was able to see him alone, having had the other inmates in class earlier in the day. It was a cold windy rainy day, and the dark blue clouds hung heavily in the sky, dumping enough rain on the soaked ground to start a thin swamp in the middle of the prison courtyard, while the flooded, pockmarked sidewalks were being splashed with droplets. It had been raining for the last couple of days and the radio forecast called for continued rain far into the foreseeable future; it was typical weather for winter on the Olympic Peninsula.

”Why don’t you get your math out Max. You started on it yesterday and you can finish it up the chapter today. You know you need the credit.”

He remained silent and did not turn around even to look at me.

Speaking now to humor him, “I can not think of a more noble subject to enrich the human soul than that of math.” He still did not turn around, only looking blankly into the thick rain and the other prisoners huddling together and walking along the drenched sidewalks.

”Have you talked to the psychologist? You said that you had been feeling depressed lately, and was wanting to see her.” Still only silence. I

turned around, retreated back to my table and sat down, deciding to wait him out for a moment. Whatever the reason, it looked like he was quietly consumed by the scene of a dark and rainy day. I could of ordered him to work, but what good would that of done, especially from a youth serving time.

”Did I ever tell you why I was in here?” Max spoke out unexpectedly, taking me by surprise.

”No, why?” I did not want to know their crimes, it would only become more emotional baggage that I did not want to be carrying around with me. But it seemed like a way to get him talking.

”I killed a friends’ little kid.” He blankly said, and then went on, “Man, I was so stoned out of my mind and angry that I shot his little kid.”

I did not know what to say, but I knew that he wanted some kind of feedback; why else would he have mentioned his crime? I thought for a moment and said, “Well, you are still young, maybe you can do some good things in your life that will help make up for the bad things you have done.”

He sat looking out the window, his face looking as bleak as the curtain of rain outside. I could not imagine what thoughts maybe running through his young mind; he was not even eighteen and had another ten years left in prison.

”My mother always did drugs. Every time I came home she would be high on something. Never had a father, just her boyfriends. Different one each

month it seemed like. And they would fight a lot. God, looking back it was crazy at home. Nobody taught me anything but how to take drugs, get angry, and use people.”

He went on, “The school I went to dumped me into a special education class for behavior problem kids and that just made things worse. I started to learn all different kinds of things from those crazy kids. I learned more from them than I did from the teacher. Then a year later I ended up here, hanging out with the worst youths in the state, and they call it a correction center.” He gave out a sarcastic laugh and shook his head.

There was an honesty, a detached neutrality in his statements that surprised me. Most kids only talk about things in a very heated and emotional manner; but here I only heard a cool, rational mind at work. I respected him for that.

Hoping to bolster self-confidence in him I said, “You getting closer to being an adult everyday. Hang in there Max. I think you are learning how to see and think about things for yourself, and that is really important.”

He looked back at me for just a moment as I said this, showing that he heard what I had wanted him to hear.

”Even though I hate being locked up like a caged animal, being in prison did get me off the drugs and give me time to sit around and think about a lot of things. I would not of done it otherwise.” He looked up at me to see if I understood. Then he slowly turned his body around to face the front of the classroom. From his more deliberate look I could tell that

he was now ready to start on his schoolwork.

“Believe me Max, it is very easy for kids to get their brains messed up, for a number of reasons, especially in America.” I said this feeling a need to reassure him, but he was looking down intently at this math now and beginning to write out a problem, so I left him alone.

It was a dark and dreary afternoon as I left the cabin with the dogs and headed for

the trail. Rain from earlier in the day was still dripping off the branches of a thick and bushy forest, landing with an occasional wet thump on the top of my head. The air contained a heavy mist that easily changed into a light rain, causing the sky to hang like a translucent shower curtain across the moss coated winter woodland.

I had climbed a good five hundred feet, following the various switchbacks up a steep mountainside and brushing against the countless rain-soaked scrub hanging over the edges of the trail. Looking toward the west I could only sense the position of the sun laying deep beneath the different layers of mist and rain clouds. But stopping and reflecting on how recently I had learned to enjoy hiking in the mist, finding the air to have an invigorating or stimulating effect on the body's systems, like jumping into a cool shower. But after anticipating the arrival of night at around five-thirty in the afternoon, I decided to return before it draw near too quickly.

After giving out a loud whistle to the dogs that I intend to turn around, I looked at the trail behind and below me, seeing that as darkness descended on the land so did a heavy cloud of fog; that it had rolled in and was now engulfing the forest, turning many of the huge fir trees into thin gray silhouettes.

The dogs Orion and Suka, who were ahead of me on the trail now hurried pass me to regain the lead in our return to the cabin. As we descended into the bank of fog, it gave an eerie cast to walking the switchbacks back downhill. Feeling the approach of night fall I quickened my pace to see to it that I would arrive home before absolute darkness held the land in its' firm grip.

Perhaps, the initial sight came out of an over anxious imagination due to having faced off with vindictive lawyers, or maybe it was from dealing with the despair of youth caged in such desperate isolation, or living alone in a wilderness cabin for too long a time: but suddenly I saw a face staring out at me from the fog. It was a cotton white face clinging to the fog like a water drop hanging on an Autumn leaf. Then another face appeared near the first one, but this was floating in the air with a stronger sense of presence and character, as though at any moment it may decide to speak to me. They had full human faces attached to bodies made of mist borrowed from the rolling rain. Stopping for a moment, I looked carefully at the strange figures, noticing that numerous other gray faces and cotton-like figures had lodged themselves amongst the trees now

blanketed by the fog. They all appeared to be looking at me, watching as I passed further down the wet bushy trail.

Moving more cautiously now, not knowing whether I beheld a crazed sight or a true vision, and the dogs far ahead of me still heading home, I noticed that as soon as one figure disappeared back into the surrounding fog, another one would appear elsewhere as though it had just arrived from a distant, mystic world. The fog seemed to control their every silent movement and nameless gesture, giving me an ever greater feeling of fear and veneration. These spirits of dispossession created a whole scene of incredibly deep anonymity within the sleepy, twilight forest. It was like watching the ghosts of the dead return to a weird woodland to await the arrival of deceased loved ones. The forest was transformed into a thin, one dimensional terrain of timeless despair. Or possibly, it was just me losing my mind.

It was soon afterward, as I was nearing the bottom of the mountain trail where it connected to the abandoned road, that the clouds parted momentarily and the setting sun gave out its' last glorious gleam of light for the day. Like a flashing golden sword the beam of light carved a spirit of strength and joy out of the dark dreariness of the rain clouds, causing the fog to turn back into a gloomy but translucent cloud bank.

Once I took my eyes off the sudden appearance of the sun, the fog people were gone. Only a darkening forest baring a cloak of mist remained. It reminded me of times that I would swear that I had seen the face of a man

in the surface of a boulder, or in the twisting knurls of an ancient tree.

But this time there were numerous people in different spots, coming and going, as though wrestling in and out of the fog.

As I walked down the abandoned road back to the cabin, a fear possessed my mind that it had just slipped away from reality, and may not be coming back for awhile. But walking a quarter mile to the front door of the cabin served to calm most of the uncertainties, so I was able to relax into a comfortable routine for the evening.

After setting the fire in the old wood cookstove and seeing the interior heat slowly rise from a chilly fifty-five degrees to nearly sixty, I sat down in the rocking chair with the plump body of Kitty curling in my lap. Seeking some form of resolution, I carefully turned over the sequence of the past events in my mind, looking to see what had occurred and possibly try to understand why. But there was no cause and effect to uncover; what had happened must stand on its' own for me to remember the rest of my life. It must remain as a fear stirring forever inside of me, saying that in the arrival of each night my soul must begin anew a desperate search for a missing sun, for an eternal source of light.

Chapter Break

It was the time of noon break and only a few of the high school staff remained on the education floor, eating sack lunches and discussing

politics or the day's events, while others worked alone, sitting at book covered desks, catching up on their classroom paperwork. This was always a quiet, reflective, unhurried time of the day.

The school hallway had an abandoned appearance as I stepped up out of the stair well and through an unlocked gate, having returned from another quick lunch in the staff dining hall, where one could usually find a well rounded meal prepared by the kitchen workers, which were a couple of adult inmates. After a few months of eating there, I no longer thought about the fact that the hands of a convicted murderer was tossing my salad.

They took pride in preparing the best meal possible.

But as I stepped up to the main floor of this school, even inside of a maximum security prison, I felt amazed that the still lingering presence of youthful minds searching for livelihoods, the mystic atmosphere evoked by the pursuit of knowledge, could still be felt emanating from the white plaster walls and the shiny but abandoned hallways. My mind drifted for a moment, reflecting on the spirit of education being such an intense, deeply lodged phenomenon that it's presence, it's airy essence could remain so invisibly in barren school buildings, even during the quiet summer months, when classes have stopped weeks if not months previously.

The lunch break combined with planning time lasted an hour and a half between the morning and afternoons classes, and it was an important breather space for the teachers. This was time to prepare for coming classes, but it was also time to re-connect through informal chats with

other members of the staff; it was an opportunity to once again feel like an adult who still had a real life by being socially grounded, by relaxing and talking to other hopefully, well grounded grown-ups.

I walked into Stephen's room where he sat alone to one side of his classroom, squeezed into a small student desk, reading a newspaper, with a ham sandwich, a soda, and some grapes spread out before him. Giving a short greeting, I sauntered over to and stopped at the far wall where I could peer out one of the two barred windows mounted there, looking out fancifully for any deer passing through and grazing in the large grassy meadow just on the other side of the tall prison fence. My eyes wandered over to the woods just beyond the clearing, trees which extended for endless miles in all directions; and then I looked north, where the windy sea cushioned the rugged, rocky shoreline of the Olympic Peninsula; on the horizon a blanket of dark blue clouds could be seen huddling over and nearly covering Vancouver Island.

Though he looked pre-occupied, I decided to venture into a topic that had been worming its' way into my mind for the past few weeks. "Stephen," I said pointedly, "have you ever struggled with a problem, having it bogged down in your brain like some torturous tumor that won't go away? You search desperately for an answer to this seemingly insoluble question, and then suddenly one morning when you wake up and the solution is sitting right there, staring you in the face?" I was speaking steadfastly, while turning around slowly, to face Stephen as he sat on the other side of the

room, staring into a morning newspaper. I felt he won't mind a discussion right now, because we had done it nearly everyday since starting work at Clallam Bay. Both of us enjoy these lunch time chats for it was a way to unwind and take our minds off the pressures of teaching troubled youths. I heard only a low, mumbling acknowledgment coming from him, while not looking up at me; but I decided to continue on talking about an idea that had been gnawing away at me tensely all morning. I continued, "I've been thinking a lot about public education and why the system does not seem to be working well as it should. It's just does not feel right. You take a serious look at when the kids we have here in prison started to go bad, and for nearly everyone of them started when they stopped going to school. A lot of them dropped out as early as junior high, and then others in middle school. That was when they got frustrated with the school system and just stopped going. From that point on, as social outcasts, the only guidance they got came from their homies. I mean, how easy and convenient for both the kids and the schools. The kids get to wander loose in the streets, learning the life of outlaws, while the school has one less difficult student in their classrooms." I was pacing back and forward in the front of his classroom, looking upwards, struggling to collect my thoughts and speaking them as well as possible.

"You think our schools should be blamed for kids dropping out? Special education kids get a lot of additional attention." He spoke without looking at me, only peering down doggedly at his newspaper.

Glad at the chance to respond to a question, I turned and said, “we talk to these kids about it all the time. Often times it is like trying to fit a round peg into a square hole. It should not always be the kid’s fault, or the teacher’s, that the system does not work. My god, the drop-out rates in this country are awful and they’re not changing anytime soon. As teachers we should know how to help kids so they don’t go back to the mean and ugly streets, wrecking their lives through drugs and crime; which is what we have seen happened repeatedly here in prison.”

Stephen looked at me suddenly, while still holding up the newspaper and I felt concerned that he wanted to be left alone to read and finish his lunch, but then he said a bit contentiously, “So you want to blame the school for kids getting into drugs and running around in gangs? I thought that was a family problem, a lack of discipline at home.” After having said this he promptly put his nose back into the newspaper and crammed half a sandwich into a waiting mouth.

I paused while turning around to look out of the barred window, peering at the bushy meadow again, this time seeing a large brownish-red doe slowly walking through the center of the clearing. I must of missed seeing her before; perhaps she was hidden behind a large clump of bushes while eating leaves. A strange sensation occurred to me just than, seeing the animal gently stopping to graze; she could of been a thousand miles away, even living in another distant, earthly period of time, and her life would not have any difference from what it is now. She was living in a

very simple world in which deer have always lived, at any time and in any place, so far removed from the rapid changes Man has known. There was something indefinably precious about her ageless simplicity and innocence.

I was expecting the response Stephen had given and was prepared for it. I was looking at a crucial part of the solution I discovered waiting for me as I woke up that morning; an explanation for what I felt to be a willful neglect on the part of our schools. It was an answer to an old question and it had been staring me in the face all morning, like a forgotten friend who just returned from long journey aboard. All I wanted was Stephen's opinion to its validity.

"OK, please listen carefully," I began while looking into his eyes to see if he was listening, "Being cultural institutions, schools can not think outside of the box, or classroom in this case." I tried to emphasize this point to make sure he was following, because he still buried deep in the newspaper, while supposedly listening to me at the same time.

"Stephen, these kids can not learn in a box. That is why the system that causes many of them to get so frustrated and angry that they quit, because the school is not addressing their basic needs, no matter what classroom they are in. And why does an education have to be done in a classroom any ways? The community is the best place for real world learning and we all know it. So why has it been taken out of teaching and replaced by textbooks?"

Looking up at me and then turning an another page in his newspaper Stephen said, “sounds like you’re saying that schools don’t know how to teach at-risk kids. I know quite a few who did fine in special education classes. You’ve got kids passing their IEP goals.” Looking up from the newspaper only momentarily, and then grabbing some fruit out of a small bag on his desk as his head tilted back downward.

”Depending on how you define “success” a lot of kids seemingly do well in our schools. But when you look at the dropout rates, especially in the poorer areas of our country, you’ll have to admit that schools don’t work well for many of the at-risk population, and that is a serious problem for public education.”

”Well, Mister I-found-the-answer-in-bed-this-morning, what is it?”

I took a deep breath, thought about the images and the ideas that came to me as I awoke that misty morning; then looked once more over my shoulder at the deer slowly eating, browsing, and continuing to walk through the dense, green meadow.

After this short pause I began. “I will put it this way. Despite our Industrial Age, you can not educate children without them understanding and caring about the world they live in. It is a world where things grow from childhood to adulthood, from dependency to independence. First you help them to understand and care about the community they live in; then their own lives and how it relates to that varied, living landscape. If they do not understand their own environment, how can they have good ideas

concerning the nature of life in that land?" I looked at Stephenn and then went on. "In other words, I believe that the more one studies, understands and cares for, any particular matter, the more one develops a relationship with that subject, thereby creating a channel through which a sense of personal enrichment can flow from the world of nature to one's inner self. By finding and studying subjects within the natural community, these at-risk kids will be able to more easily build meaningful relationships and hopefully not lose their sense of self worth within their own communities. It is not so much the subject that is important, but rather the personal development, the sense of personal completion, that occurs when a young person starts to contemplate, relate to and care about, any of the many wonder found in the world about them."

Much of what I was saying seemed to get swallowed by the empty air between me and Stephen. I was sure he was listening, but that did not mean I was making much sense. "Now listen Stephen, this brings me to the dream I had last night. In it I was walking up a winding path when I saw this large wooden doorway that was the entrance into a huge Gothic style of building, a sort of castle structure; then the dream vanishes, I am starting to wake up, and before even getting a chance to open my eyes an idea strikes me. It comes out of nowhere. At-risk children have a difficult time entering into subject matter. They need to be able to enter into it like I can enter or walk into the woods. Schools need to learn that not all kids can enter into subject matter while sitting at a

desk; and that desk learning oftentimes is a poor substitute for real life learning. The castle in my dream represented “real life”. The subject matter that is most appropriate for at-risk kids, the ones who are likely to drop out, lays in the community, not in the schools. I think many of them know this, but are not able to explain it to the teachers or school officials, and that is why so many of them drop out.”

Stephen stopped for a minute to look up at me, saying as matter of fact, “So who will teach these kids in the community?”

His question came across as sarcastic, as though he had his mind made up and was talking out of boredom.

Refusing to give up easily I replied, “Responsible adults!” I almost screamed it out. For some reason the obvious answer was invisible to him.

“I believe that utilizing more of a community based approach can save a lot of kids from dropping out.”

There appeared a slight trace of a grin on his face as he spoke, surely sensing my distress, “So you are saying that education needs to be more than just reading and writing.”

I chuckled hearing this. So he understood me after all. “These state mandated tests that we get around here, to see what kids know or do not know are ridiculous, and most teachers know it. They have little to do with learning how to live ones life.”

Stephen spoke, “I hear that. Just wait until the kids go through their first divorce with children. That will teach them about the meaning of

life. Man, I think that was how I learned my important lessons. From now on I'm doing everything through a lawyer." He looked at me again, wiped his mouth and chuckled.

"Stephen, I'm talking about how kids grow to see, understand things, and apply that knowledge to their relationships in life. If you had learn more about the value and meaning of relationships in school you may not of gone through that divorce."

Stephen gave me a cold glance, a warning that I was walking in dangerous territory. "Mister, it is going to take more than a good education to stop divorces in this country."

"Lighten up Stephen, I was just trying to joke." I could sense that the lunch hour was passing away quickly and there were still things I wanted to say.

"Are you trying to suggest that education be involved in personal relationships? I thought that was for the therapists." said Stephen while taking a bite from his sandwich and then wiping his mouth.

"I know this will probably sound crazy but listen. It is like having a wife or child, to truly know something, we practically have to be able to see the way it sees, breathe the way it breathes, and walk the way it walks. And to be able to do that we need to be able to teach these kids how to close their eyes to their own egotistical blindness and clearly see the "other", the subject matter for and of itself entirely. To be able to perceive it as deeply as possible, and thus learn. This is what a quality

”liberalizing” education is all about, helping these kids to enter into the world around them, learning how to see and understand it, then apply that knowledge into a form of community service, not only for-profit businesses.”

I paused a moment to see if Stephen understood me. Not seeing any response

I turned to look out the window again, seeing that mist had blanketed the distant hills of Vancouver Island. Not even its’ mountain peaks were visible any longer on the northern horizon, only the thin line of bluish ocean rising into dark blue clouds, climbing again into an infinitely swirling sky. A flock of large crows flew out of the nearby forest of fir trees on the crest of the hill, but dark clouds huddled in the far western sky, promising rain to arrive by evening.

Sensing that his attention was drifting away from me I said, “Stephen, we all go through difficult times in life. Life is meant to be a challenge.

Once a person makes contact with, or connects with a particular subject, it then becomes a center for their thoughts and action, and they can be deeply transformed by it. Call it magic, or archetypal psychology, but think about it. What are the things that change people in their lives?

It is the things they become involved with! They find a subject that interests them, they enter into it, then it changes them for life!”

I paused for a moment seeing a woman prison guard, who had been working that morning on the education floor, walk by the room. I looked quickly at my watch to see that in a few minutes the kids would be coming back for

their afternoon classes. I was going to have to get back to my classroom and prepare for the afternoon classes.

Then it hit me, how much I was feeling rejected. Stephen continued to just sit there staring fixedly at his newspaper. I really was not sure if he was listening, so I paused for a moment to collect the conflicting thoughts and emotions that were flying around in my brain like a flock of sparrows on an afternoon chase.

Stephen seemed finally to perk up and revealed the fact that he had been listening. Looking at me for a minute he said edgily, “Oh, so teachers are suppose to become psychologists also? As though we had time in class to put a kid on the couch and let him reminisce about the problems of his earlier childhood!”

I was struck unexpectedly by the strength of emotions that underpinned his comments, so much that I replied, “Stephen, your not angry are you? I’m sorry if I’ve been bothering you; should I leave the room?”

”No, no you are all right. Sometimes I get tired of listening to all this bleeding heart, liberal crap. But it’s all right,” he started to wave his hand around in circles above his head. “Continue on, I want to know where you are going with this. Tell me why teachers need to be psychologists also.”

Hearing his typical sarcasm I knew Stephen was being entertained, at least partially. So I relaxed a bit and went back to talking about my new ideas on education, hoping if not for anything else, perhaps for some more of

his derision; anything as long as I knew I was not annoying him.

”I know that society needs uniformity so we can understand each other.

But it is a fact that the mass of humanity suffers from a mindless conformity that turns life into a very dark, rugged and challenging wilderness for any thoughtful, sensitive, or abandoned youth who must learn to find their own way through the madness.”

At this point the woman guard walked up to the classroom door, stuck her head into the room and said, “The kids will be here in a couple of minutes, better get your thinking caps on.” She gave a little chuckle and then walked on down the hallway.

Stephen looked at me and said, “that’s ok, finish up what your saying, so I can think about it, and then maybe we can talk about it after school.”

Then he got out of his desk and started to put his lunch away in a cabinet draw.

“I’ll admit to a bias in that to me education means “to bring forth from the darkness,” as a tool to conquer human folly.” I was saying this in a way to humor him.

Stephen put down the newspaper, balled up his hands as though to rub them dry, and then looked at me abruptly saying, “if my little Johnny dropped out of school I won’t want a teacher running around trying to teach him.

God, let him suffer. Maybe that will teach him something.” Stephen looked exasperated, taking his glasses off for a moment to rub both eyes with the fingers of one hand. Then he continued, “My god Cole, get a grip, you’re

not sounding like a teacher at all, but like some New Age guru. All you're really saying is that schools need to be in the business of raising kids as well as educating them. But that is the parent's job!" Stephen a bit annoyed at first as he said this, but then he quickly calmed down, probably thinking that I had off the deep end so to become sarcastic, just some dry humor to lighten the moment.

I spoke, "With the way lawyers are now days, constantly looking for excuses for more lawsuits, you would think schools would try to fix these problems. Remember, by law, the schools have been ordered by the federal government to provide a free and appropriate education to all kids."

I had started to pace back and forth in front of the classroom, while Stephen sat back down at his student desk and began turning pages more rapidly than before; I thought perhaps he was quickly searching for the sports section before his class arrived.

"Teachers simply would be helping these at-risk kids to "individuate" as Carl Jung would say; they would be assisting them in finding they own "face" as the Indians call it; learning from the inside out, while also acquiring important skills and relationships within their communities."

Stephen got a smile on his face and said, "Sounds like you want education to go native in its approach. That is a whole different way of looking at education, and people don't change their ways of thinking easily."

"I know, but I'm just talking about changing the way we teach our most vulnerable youth. I know that knowledge is power, but beliefs are even

more powerful. Adolescents need a way to develop their belief systems and schools need to recognize that fact.”

When I looked back out the barred window I saw that the deer had disappeared. The grassy meadow was empty now except for a light breeze swaying the numerous bushes and patches of long, green blades of grass, thinking perhaps later that afternoon the deer would return. I knew that a group of them rotated their way daily through the meadow.

Various voices could be heard combined with the distant sound of the footsteps of our students walking down the hallway. Afternoon school had just officially started and I needed to get back to my students in IMU.

”I’ll remember that it takes a village to raise a child; but we’ll have to find time to discuss it later.” Stephen said this hurriedly and had already put his lunch and newspaper away when suddenly his students began to filter in through his door.

After picking up my bag of lesson materials I headed back to my scheduled classes feeling sure that what he meant by “talking later” would never happen.

Chapter Break

During the following week, while settling in for a quiet evening at the cabin, I picked up the ringing telephone to hear the voice of my wife. “A friend told me about Chantrelle mushrooms, the ones you can find in the woods. Only specialty stores have them, but they are so expensive. Could you get some and bring them home this weekend? They are suppose to be

really good with herbs and butter.”

I knew what she was talking about: the cantaloupe-orange, irregularly shaped mushrooms seen during the winter months in the rain forest. People spend hours searching for and then selling them, and other edible mushrooms, to the local dealers in the area.

Remembering where I had seen some previously I said, “OK. I’ll see what I can do and bring some back with me this weekend.”

The next day, after arriving home from work and deciding that I would not be gone long, I left the dogs at home, and then drove out of the driveway and headed for the open road. After cruising several miles west I turned off on an old logging road that took me about a bumpy mile north directly toward a different part of the same range of mountains that lay behind the cabin. The thick, tall forest hung over the small road like the jaws of a dark, primeval beast ready to devour unsuspecting prey. But I had been there before and took no heed of any vague warnings, of any red flags being unfurled in my mind.

Grabbing a plastic grocery bag, I started walking out on a trail that quickly curved its way deep into the woods and gently turned north toward the mountains. In the first mile I had picked only a few Chantrelle mushrooms and was beginning to think I would not find as many as I had hoped for. Sensing that the evening was fast approaching I decided to conduct a foray off the trail to see what I could find in the thick, mossy debris of the forest floor.

Thinking carefully, designing a strategy to prevent any mistakes that could confuse and lead me to becoming lost, I decided the best approach would be to head out in a straight line about hundred yards, look around and then return back to the trail the same way.

This method was used a couple of times, but still there were little, if any mushrooms to be picked. The small grocery bag I carried remained nearly empty. Seeing the sky growing continuously dark and a light mist beginning to accent the cool air, I decided to try one more time before returning to the truck.

After walking about an eighth of a mile further along the trail I turned off of it sharply and walked in a straight line through the thick underbrush of the woods, measuring off what I believed to be a hundred yards. Before being able to finish though I saw a large patch of the bright orange mushrooms sticking up through a heavy carpeting of moss. Finally, the prize I had been in search of was realized! Moving around in circles, making sure that no delicate tubular growth of fungus remained, I quickly scoured and picked all there were in the area. In only a few minutes nothing of value could be seen among the fallen wood and plump ferns of the forest floor. The plastic bag now was nearly half full, and the rubbery smell of fresh mushrooms filling me with a sense of gratification.

But all that change quickly when I realized the unthinkable. In the haste to find and pick as many mushrooms as possible I had forgotten the

way back to the trail. Just as one tree looked much the same as any other, so did the different directions going back. Again I thought of the approaching evening and the cold it was sure to bring. Looking up at the cloudy sky there appeared to be roughly two hours left of daylight. That was when a morbid memory of reading in the local newspaper the story of a mushroom hunter who disappeared while hunting in the woods, presumably after becoming lost and never making it back to his car. Hopefully, I was not to become a similar short blurb in the evening paper.

Refusing to let despair envelope me, I began to walk determinedly in a single direction, looking for the trail in about a hundred yards, but nothing appeared. So I went back to the apparent starting point, where I had found the numerous mushrooms, picked out a different direction and began to walk another straight line for about a hundred yards. Still nothing but empty woods. This procedure I repeated again and again, too many times to remember much less recount, all the while refusing to let despair and panic overwhelm me. It was so frustrating to think that the slim trail may lay just beyond my reach, only a few yards if not feet from some of the places where I turned around.

Time became a blur and I started wandering desperately, just for the sake of moving, always hoping to come upon the trail. The mist turned to a light brushing of falling snow as the sky grew darker. My despair turned into panic, and then back to despair. Several times I was convinced that I was only walking in circles, seeing various apparently familiar patches

of woods.

Slowly resolving to the idea of spending the night in the forest, I sat down at the foot of a large fir tree, hoping to clear my mind and formulate an effective strategy for my present situation. Looking at the back of my hand I could see tiny particles of snow fall on it and then slowly melt from the body's heat.

Suddenly, piercing through the forest gloom the hoot of an owl boomed out from distant trees. Looking out straight ahead of me, I peered through the darkness, trying to imagine the location of the bird. The dark wall of eighty foot fir trees stood before me as silent witness to the ordeal I was undergoing.

Then again the owl called out from the same location, in the thick gloom of the forest. Deciding that anything would be better than merely sitting in hopeless despair, I got up and began to walk to where I thought the owl sat in the trees. Climbing over moss covered, fallen trees, through thickets of bushes, I made for the tree that supposedly contained the owl.

But just as I was nearing the place I saw a large shadowy bird with huge wings suddenly leaped out of the upper portions of the tree and flew farther ahead of me, in the same direction I had been traveling. Soon disappearing behind the tree tops I relaxed my efforts to clamber up close to the bird. But no sooner than seeing it vanish in the twilight, I heard it again, calling out from its' new perch in a tree still straight ahead of me, close to the same distance that he was before. Feeling a bit

mystified by still hearing the bird, I decided to continue the walk, hoping this time to get a close up look at it. Again clabbering over the thick, wooded ground cover of the forest, taking me about another ten minutes, I again slowly gained ground on the bird, nearing its' airy perch among the trees. But much as before, when approaching the tree that harbored this feather soul, its' shadowy form flew off once again in the same direction as before.

Looking back it is hard to say exactly how many times this series of events was repeated on that dark and fearful afternoon. Much of my involvement with that bird was for the benefit of having its' company, to distract my mind from the despair of not know what my future may bring. But each and every time it flew away I followed as closely, as faithfully as possible. This must of gone on for over an hour, or perhaps two.

It was just as the last traces of twilight were leaving the sky that I heard a new sound. Stopping to better tune my whole body into understanding its source, I strained to listen to what I thought at first was the ocean surf. A breezy, swishing noise rose quickly and then fell away just as fast. Still standing there, soon afterwards, another surf-like noise rose up and then gradually died away. The highway! I thought and it is directly ahead. I am getting close to the highway and I only need to listen for the cars to know which direction to keep walking! This I did and in roughly fifteen minutes I was walking down the side of the road. Having found a familiar sign that clearly told me where I was

on the highway, I immediately headed westerly to find the side logging road where my truck was parked, thinking that I only had another mile to walk.

Looking at my watch as I was approaching the truck in the dark, I saw that it was now seven thirty and I would be back at home before eight o'clock. What a relief this had turned out to be, I thought while throwing the small bag of mushroom behind the seat, and quickly started up the truck to head home.

"Look, I don't care how much those things cost in the stores, I am not picking mushrooms anymore!" Speaking angrily to my wife.

"Boy, you sound upset. What happened? Did you get lost?" she said.

"No, I didn't. It not easy walking around in the woods when it starts to get so dark." I doubted that I sounded very convincing.

"Well, you sound pretty stressed out. Something happened out there." She paused for a minute and then went on, "You are coming home this weekend, right?"

"Yeh. Maybe we can go to church on Sunday. It has been awhile since I've been to there." I said, uncertain how she would respond.

"Church!" She gave out a loud laugh. "Man, you have changed."

After talking with her, I grabbed a glass of wine and sat down in the corner rocking chair, Kitty as usual quickly jumped up on my lap. My thoughts swirled around the events that had just occurred, my emotions

still struggling to understand them. A vision of the owl flew into my mind and I reflected carefully on the part it played in my safe return. Why was it calling out like it did? Why did it fly directly to the highway? Perhaps it was in search of its' evening meal, hoping to spot fresh road kill. But the way it flew a short distance, stopped, called out, repeating this pattern again and again. That was what really mystified me. Almost as a spirit guardian, it appeared just as I was giving up hope. The way it practically summoned and delivered me from almost certain death in the woods; it was these ideas that drove me want to go to church, so I could better comprehend the concepts of natural spirits and personal salvation.

Chapter Break

There was the regular informal gathering of staff, sitting as they usually did early in the morning, this time in Marge's classroom. Frank was standing in the doorway as usual, leaning against the door frame looking as though he expecting a phone call soon and wanted to be able to hear it from the hallway.

The nasal sounding voice of Marge was the first one I heard, "As teachers we have the responsibility to guide our youths, as well as possible, toward adulthood. This should mean more than simply preparing them for employment, like most school district seem focused on."

Suddenly Stephen chirped up, "I know what you mean, but what good are well balanced adults if they can not get good jobs? They will get frustrated

and become personal wrecks.”

Frank burst forth at this point with his own view, “I think the better we can help these kids to connect in a positive way with just about anything, be it school work, a teacher or teachers, an important goal for themselves, even with their own peers and family, the better their chances are of not coming back to prison.” He paused for a moment, drank some coffee, and then went on, “And quite frankly, I think that is our strong point as a school. We are too small to do much academically, and these kids generally do not care about the advanced stuff, but we do a good job with helping them to build those interpersonal skills that many of them need so badly.”

Stephen jumped into the discussion saying, “That is something I do enjoy as a teacher. I like being able to work on getting them to settle down willingly; to see those lights go on and they suddenly want to participate in my class.”

Marge spoke up from her sit behind her desk, where she was also drinking some coffee and going through some student papers, “It is not so much that I want them to like me, but rather I want them to value or respect our relationship. I want them to learn that relationships, especially working relationships, have importance in and of themselves, and do not violate that kind of trust. That is something most of them never had the chance to see while growing up, and I still think it is something that should be emphasized more in our schools; plus it is the key component to becoming a

contributing member in our society.”.”

Stephen leaned forward in the student chair he was sitting in, with his hands folded together before him he said, “I think the more we can turn them on to reading, the better their chances of getting turned out to the idea of education in general. Books can do a lot for changing the way people think and feel about themselves.”

Frank replied with a chuckle, “Some these guys, that is all they do is read in their cells. I think I’ve heard that some of them taught themselves how to read just while they have been in prison.”

Marge spoke up again, “But have you seen the types of books they like to read? Man, they full of crime and violence.” She thought for awhile and then said, “They are almost as bad as those TV movies I get at home.”

Stephen chirped up again, this time leaning back on his chair, “One thing I like about this school is that practically no one here just lectures.

Most of us deal with these kids one on one. That is we treat them as individuals, we get to know them well and accommodate to their individual needs. Other schools talk about it, but I think we do a pretty good job of it here.”

Frank stepped forward into the classroom and then spoke, “One of the teachers mentioned that the county jail in Seattle had an experimental program in teaching inmates meditation skills. I suppose they had volunteers involvement in it. But in this environment where people are locked up for so long, and there is very little to do with your time, I’d

think learning how to meditate would be perfect in this place. Plus it would help you learn how to better handle the stress in here.”

I decided to walk into the classroom and grabbed a chair far enough from Stephen and Marge so they could have their own space. Then hearing what Frank had just said I replied, “I’ve talked to some of the guys in the hole about it, but I think they are so afraid being overwhelmed by the intensity of their own emotions. Some of these kids have a lot of repressed energy, both good and bad.”

Frank shuffled a little on his feet, put both of his hands in his pockets and then said, “Well, the main thing we have done so far and I’m sure we will never regret is that we got away from the grading system. I think schools get too hung up in whether student work gets an A, B, or a C grade. And then the student, if they get a C or a D, begins to feel stupid and the parents want to complain. It is really does get ridiculous sometimes.”

Feeling the urge to speak up I said, “ I really like the advisor/advisee time we spend at the end of every quarter. I think the idea of spending time once every quarter to just sit down one on one with some of the students only to talk about things is time well spent. Every time we do it I feel that a deeper sense of appreciation is building between the student and myself. It gives us time to better get to know each other. He is not just a student anymore and I’m not just a teacher. Schools do not talk about it much, but teachers need to have time to be mentors

also.”

Frank, stepping back in to the hallway, looking quickly toward his office and then turned to face the classroom said, “Another thing I think is really working, which kind of goes along with the way we are doing, or not doing the grades, is the way we do credit. As you all know, if a kid is really working, he can move ahead as quickly as he can turn in the work, and get credit just as fast. Instead of having to wait all year to get credit, they can do it in a few months. This frees up the smart, motivated kids to earn as they learn, and not feel trapped in a system where everyone in class must move head together.”

Stephen leaned back into his chair again, this time in preparation for his response to what Frank had said, “I think that really illustrates how different our situation really is here, I mean having to teach kids in an adult prison. I think it has forced us to utilize some pretty unconventional methods in being able to reach and teach these kids. Practically all of them dropped out of school. But from what I have seen so far this year, they seem to not only accept coming to school everyday, because the guards make them do it, but when I walk around and see them in the classes, they actually seem to enjoy school. I think it gives them a feeling that something is going on in their lives that is still good, something that is going to help them be what they want to be in life. When they are in school they don’t feel like a convict anymore, they are just another high school student, trying to get their diploma. I think a

lot of these kids, even though they would never admit it, are afraid of prison. They are afraid that once they leave they will come back here. School offers them a sense of hope that this will not happen.”

Marge had stood up and was reaching for a textbook from a shelf near her desk when she said, “The individualizing we do here helps to send the message that we think that they are important, and I believe it helps to motivate them and for them to feel that learning how to take care of themselves is equally as important.” Then she sat back down in her chair and started turning pages in the book. She was working but I still felt that she was enjoying our chat.

There was a pause in the conversation, at which point an idea struck me that I decided to give voice to, partly to see what kind of response I would get from the others, “I always believe in the meaningfulness of the curriculum I teach, knowing that it is really important in an environment like this one, but the problem I tend to have with that kind of concept is how can something be meaningful without the idea of love being connect to it? I mean, is it not true that what is meaningful for people usually is something that they love; and what they love is what they find to be meaningful? I think many of these kids never learned about the value of love in their lives, so they never learned how to value their lives.

Emptiness can do that to people. A quality education should not be leaving people feeling empty or without any real sense of purpose to their lives, except to get the high paying jobs, because all they really learned

at school was to think about themselves first. That is not teaching citizenship.” I looked around the room when I finished and none of the others looked back at me. Stephen could be seen giving Marge a quick smirk, as those I had just stuck my foot in my mouth. Frank was looking down at his feet as though wondering why they were not moving him anywhere. Marge appeared only to be trying to rescue the moment by saying, “The only real way of doing that is to have an educational process that intentionally tries to teach the kids about the value of “love”. Boy, now that would be a trick, wouldn’t it?”

I decided to bring the tone back to a normal reality, “I’m sorry if I seem off the mark, but those kids in the hole are going to have a hard time putting the pieces of their lives back together. It is emotionally draining to see them like that and not be able to do much to help them.” Stephen spoke abruptly, “But that is not your job! They put themselves in that situation, and they will have to learn how to get themselves out of it. All you need to do is provide them with an opportunity to get a high school diploma, and if they do not want that, so what! Get a grip, Cole; you are not a therapist. Just do your job as a teacher.” His eyes were bright and the tone of his voice was sharp with emotion. It almost felt like he was about to pounce on me at any moment.

Would it not be nice if life could be so simple, I thought while walking out of the room. If you do not like the heat you get out of the kitchen, was the second thought I had while starting down the stairs and heading to

my first morning class.

”Speak to them as though from a dream and they will follow you.” It was one of my favorite quotes from Native America culture, but I could not remember the book in which I saw it. The old saying repeated itself in my mind with no apparent end, as I drove cautiously to work the next morning; the roads were covered with a white frost and black ice could be felt in certain spots pulling at the wheels of my truck. The invisible ice was known to lie in wait on winter highways, catching the unwary and hurling them to an uncertain death.

Memories of the talk from the previous day swirled around in the back of my mind; what was done was done and there was nothing I could do to change what was say or felt by my peers. A teaching staff should be a collection of different teachers with a variety of points of view; no one perspective should be any better than another. I understand that, but do the others?

To put my mind at rest, as I usually did on my way to work, by trying to remember the dreams occurring from the night before. Usually it was difficult to recollect most of the details of any one particular dream, but I usually could bring one to mind and comprehend an important part of it. It was a simple but deep process of placing one’s self back into the context of the dream and then draw out the emotional content of it. The

emotions within a dream were the key to unlocking the symbolism, through which one would be able to interpret the meaning of the dream. After doing this for much of my life I felt that there was no better way for one to learn the wisdom of life than through dream interpretation; but it required a clear and sensible mind. A mind that knows the emotional weight and personal concepts that certain symbols can carry with them. "Speak to them as though." Political leaders understand this and use it all the time; now only if teachers could use it to improve the quality of instruction. Speak to students as significantly and unforgettably as possible, like a village elder would while preparing his young warriors for their tests of manhood, their right of passage.

While sitting in darkness, watching the headlights of my truck swept back and forth across the vacant road, my mind journeyed to the previous night, struggling to remember, and then seeing in a dream a large flock of crows circling over the cabin, then diving into a deep lake, where they fed on small, silvery-white, darting fish. But every time they caught one and began to fly off with it in their sharp claws, the fish would quickly squirm and fall back into the open lake. There was a subtle feeling of desire and hunger well contained in this dream; not a physical appetite but more like a lost, spiritual hunger. I knew that fish were used as symbols for the spirit of Christianity, and the lake could easily represent the subconscious mind; both the lake and the subconscious have very similar receptive, exposed, and transparent natures. The birds were

trying to feed from the lake, like the thoughts of my conscious self were trying to learn deeper truths from the more primeval subconscious, hence the feeling of hunger.

The while driving further, beginning to climb up the curvy road of Burnt Mountain, a thick layer of fog blanketed the road, my headlights glowing in the white cottony haze. While slowing down and watching carefully for the curves in the road, I suddenly remembered the tall trees. Of how the same flock of crows finally swirled through the sky in a black horde and nestled in a large swaying tree; behind it the sun was half swallowed by the distant horizon. A feeling of fear rose at this point, like there was an unwanted darkness associated with this tree; shadows were seen darting about on the ground below, perhaps they sleeping shapes that were half buried, entombed within the earth. They were like unrealized potentials, undiscovered truths still lodged in the dark depths of my mind. Suddenly I noticed that the shapes were all crawling toward me in the cabin. From the horde of crawling shapes arose one who appeared to have more authority than the others, a king or ruler of the sleepy-crawlies. But just as soon as he did so, the flocking crows returned, swarming about, descending from the sky and attacking him just as he and his comrades were approaching the cabin.

Then it got windy and a fear rose up again in me, suggesting that this battle could make me sick, that the conflict outside in the yard may cause a serious illness inside of me. I was fearing a conflict that was quietly

stirring within myself, I thought reflectively while still driving through the night fog of Burnt Mountain. But what this issue could be would not present itself easily, to my conscious mind.

Thinking back into the dream, I remembered standing there in the cabin doorway, watching this scene unfold outside, when unexpectedly a warm breeze was felt curling through the evening air. It felt so reassuring, making me want to reach out to touch and caress it. But by this time the crows had forced all the sleepy-crawlies back deep into the ground where they had disappeared. Still looking out, I could only see the dark swaying tree, silhouetted in the dusk, where the flock of crows had returned to its' uppermost branches, apparently settling in for the night.

That was when I felt myself beginning to wake up. Still in a half slumber, laying in bed, not yet having opened my eyes, a thought came out of nowhere saying, "What a strange world we live in. It is where truth, the full promise of life, has become a vague dialogue shaped by the battle of birds, flocking within the fearful landscape of the mind."

That was when I rolled over, looked out the bedroom window, and said a quiet prayer for the coming day. It was a desperate attempt at securing any sacredness of life to be found there, knowing that first I must be prepared for it.

Spring, Skunk weed, enduring pain of lawyers, question of school canceling (break down of community), need for meditation-prayer-dreams(role of

church, inspire youth toward the spiritual), youths need for someone to believe in them(Community & family, teachers), importance of beliefs (central to adolescent growth)

It was later that day after I returned to the cabin and went on my evening hike, when I had walked out nearly three miles on the river following trail which eventually turned into a county road, and the grey light of dusk had entered the forest, that the strangest of sighting occurred. An unfamiliar van was parked at the trailhead with no one present, and on the ground I saw numerous rubber bands scattered across the moist ground. But this held no real concern for me; perhaps hunters or hiking in the area. After walking a half mile down the rural road slicing its' way through the dew dripping forest, I decided to start back to the cabin. Giving out my familiar whistle and shouting "go back" to the dogs, we returned to the remote section of county road where it entered back into the woods, following the moss covered trail.

Appearing directly in front of me, hanging above the black forest of evening was a huge, glowing full moon. It sat directly above the road where it vanished into the thick shadowy woods, sitting at the end of a clear section of sky that formed a large V-shape from the tall trees converging along the side of the road and then pointing into and blending with the forest. Trees and bushes had grown tall and arched over the path that curved its' way through the dense thicket. Twilight had slowly

filled the crisp air during the hike and the landscape was now covered with silhouettes of trees and bushes, mere shadows of their former selves.

Having walked perhaps a quarter mile into the woods the weirdest, most unsettling of sights appeared. Directly ahead of me on the trail only about twenty yards and moving ever closer was a large walking bush. Measuring about six feet tall and three feet wide, thick with stems and leaves, swaying slightly left and right in a walking manner and following the trail, was a bush. Slowing down a bit to get a better look and attempting to get a grip on my startled senses, I continued to move forward refusing to succumb to hysteria or paranoia. At about ten yards I noticed that the bush was walking by means of a pair of feet that it must of obtained by some shrewd means. Then roughly at five or less yards I noticed in the weak light that a man, apparently Hispanic, was holding the large bushel with both hands up near his head. Then it occurred to me that he was collecting a bush called salal and merely was heading back to his van after a days' work in the forest. Further recollecting, the numerous rubber bands I saw were used to tie the numerous branches together while making the large bundles. Local people had once told me how the attractive, waxy leaves were gathered in the forest and sold to craft stores so they could be mixed with dry flowers and made into household decorations. Soon after seeing the first bushel carrier I came across another "walking bush", and then even a third one. Thinking to

myself that salal gathers were involved in quite an industry here in the woods, I hoped that they had the necessary work permits; otherwise I could be seen as a potential hostile witness who may call the authorities, and thus shutting down their operation. The local newspaper was full of articles of people getting caught harvesting commercial products from the National Forest without paying for a permit. My thoughts suddenly turned as dark as the evening sky had grown: the woods would be an easy place to dispose of an unwanted body. I quickened my pace in a desperate attempt to catch up to the dogs, who were by now nearly home.

Skunk Cabbage

"It sure is nice seeing the warmer weather and these days getting longer." My neighbor and I were in his garage huddled up as close to his wood stove as one could get without giving it a bear hug.

"I was getting tired of seeing my breath turn white every time I exhaled in the cabin. Once I got the fire going the place warmed up pretty nice. But that first hour of cold got old fast." I replied while rubbing my hands.

"You got that place insulated, right?"

"I did that last fall. But I don't like having any heat on while I'm gone because I don't trust the electrical system in that old place. It could easily start on fire and the nearest fire station is twenty miles away." I said.

”You’ve still got it pretty soft compared to what my grandparents went through when they moved out here from the east. They had to hand carry water. My Grandpa built his own cabin out of hand-split lumber and it took him all summer. Ha!” my neighbor laughed and went on, “I’ll always remember the story Grandma would tell of when their cow wandered into the garden and eat up all the vegetables. I think that was the year they had to go hungry just so they could afford to buy feed for the chickens. When the fall came along they were able to eat huckleberries and salmon berries. They actually use to learn from the Indians back then what was proper to pick and eat. Boy, they gathered cow parsnips, horse tail blossoms and made beautiful hotcakes with gooseberry jam. I don’t even think I’d know what a gooseberry looked like.”

I said, “I sure enjoyed picking blackberries this past fall. They were good on my evening cereal.” The bowl of cold cereal I prepared after my evening hike, mostly because I hated cooking.

My neighbor leaned forward in his chair next to the fire, flipped open the lid on a small cooler near his feet and handed me a wet but ice cold can of beer.

”Speaking of the old days, there was another plant that nearly saved the lives of my relatives back in those days. It was the Skunk Cabbage. You’ll see it blossom near in a few weeks. It is a brightly colored plant that grows in swamps and roadside ditches. It is one of the first plants to rise up and greet the spring sun. It’s easy to spot from the car

because it has large light green leaves that can grow up to three or four feet. These leaves form what looks like a “cloak” that nearly surrounds a yellowish seed bearing club that sits in the center.” He took a long sip of beer, crossed his legs and leaned back comfortable in an old wooden chair.

I knew from his look and manner that there was something on his mind and he was slowly easing his way to it. Deciding to interrupt his chain of thought I said, “Does this thing really smell that bad. Why did it get such a lousy name?”

”Some people must of thought it had a bad smell. But I like it. It has a sweet lemon-like odor that is real strong. I even stuck a plant in the kitchen one year, just for it’s spring time smell. But I think just because it grows in swampy areas near rivers that people give it a low class name.” Stopping for a moment he seemed to be reflecting on an abstract matter beyond my comprehension.

”But the point is that, being one of the first plants to grow in the spring, many of the early settlers around here learned from the Indians to use it to guard themselves from starvation, when many of them were waiting desperately for the return of the salmon, which they needed to eat.”

”I think that the early settlers in many parts of the country learned how to survive from the Indians; then later the Indians on paid for it with their lives.” Speaking while gulping down some beer.

”I know. But what they really liked about the plant was it’s large,

fleshy, rootstocks. When it was mixed with scrapings taken from the inner bark of the hemlock tree it give a sweet taste to it and then they cooked the mixture in earthen pits. Well, my Grandma once said that once these earthly pits were opened a strong sweet smell arose that easily spelled nourishment for many of the weary folk who were anxiously waiting for the return of the salmon.”

I said, “Skunk Cabbage Soup! The sound of it makes me hungry.” And then gave out a slight chuckle.

My neighbor also gave a small laugh and then went on, “The Kathlamet Indians have a myth concerning the Skunk Cabbage. Many years ago when the world was young, little food was available for people. The salmon was not yet alive and the folk who lived near the rivers had only the Skunk Cabbage to eat in the spring. Then one day after a particularly long and cruel winter, when people were eating much of the Skunk Cabbage, the first salmon crawled up and appeared at the river’s edge. The tall swarthy plant saw the numerous salmon approaching and said, “Here is our slippery nephew who has many fine eggs in his belly. But if not for me many people would of died this past season.”

”Who dares to speak to me in this way!” said the salmon.

”Your uncle, Skunk Cabbage.” Came the bold but surly reply.

When the salmon rose up and used his watery eyes to see that what had been said was true he was greatly please by the tall plant. So he gave him a large elkskin robe that encloses a magnificent war club, which was

also given to him, and then gracefully planted the proud looking plant in the richest black soil possible alongside the rivers edge.” The neighbors dog had just walked into the garage, wagging his tail, and curled up at the feet of his master. He caressed it once and then went on with his story.

”These things are your reward for helping all the people to live to see another summer.” said the grateful salmon. Taking another gulp of beer he paused and looked at me in a puzzling manner. Then he continued, “You see, people back in those days really depended on the environment for their survival. The Indians especially understood this and gave objects of the land respect they deserve. So instead of simply seeing a large bulbous plant in a swamp or roadside with a foul sounding name, I think of this story and see a heroic prince that has been rewarded for saving lives and then wrapped in a mythic robe with a war club that was given to it by a spirit of the ancient earth, by his nephew the mighty salmon.”

His statement took me by surprise. I thought he was just building up to another raw joke that he often told in times like this. Watching him sit there nearly rocking back and forth in his old chair, I knew that he was not finished yet. His eyes had gone off by themselves somewhere and he was formulating another statement.

He then said, “That is what so many people lack now days, that sense of relationship to the land, to their own environments. By selling it we took the soul from it, just like we did when the Indians were gone.”

Suddenly he stopped talking cold, drawing deep into a reflective state of mind, looking down at his feet.

He then went on, “There are certain stories that help people learn how to draw a sense of meaningfulness from their inner lives. Stories that remind people that life is not just a single stream of daily events, but an ever deepening pool of occurrences that build into a community of lives and interconnections.”

”The Indians call it the “Sacred Hoop.” I responded.

There was a look of pain in his eyes, similar to the time when he told of the death of his daughter. I could still tell that a disturbing scar laid beneath the surface of this man, and on various occasions it was bound to express itself, that much of what he had related to me contained some sort of healing process; it was more than a just simple history lesson.

”That is what I often try to do in class. I like the idea of classroom as community and we all learn from each other and from a variety of experiences. But when the state tells the schools what it is that they are suppose to be teaching, and it has nothing to do with helping kids to formulate their own beliefs and perceptions in life, then it’s hard to have much of a community.” I said this hoping to soothe his rough feelings, perhaps to change the topic.

The neighbor had just stood up and grabbed more wood to put into the slowly sinking fire. The temperature in the garage had noticeable fallen and I placed my can of beer on the concrete floor in order to rub my

frosty hands.

”Well, if my daughter had lived I’m sure she would of been a hand full to deal with, especially as a teenager. Her mother can be the same way.

Relationships are always a struggle of some sort. But that is how people learn about each other. I think God meant it to be that way. Like in a marriage, you have to want to learn from each other and appreciate each other’s differences. You know, I think that is what a community is all about.” He shoved his hands in his pockets and looked at me with a slightly brighter look in his eyes and on his face.

”It is a great lesson for our kids to learn. One that could be very useful through out their lives: not just respect people’s differences but to be able to learn from them. Kids, generally speaking, do not like to be seen sticking out from the crowd. I think the enforced conformity they experience within our schools makes it tough for them to express themselves individually. It is like they lose themselves within the classroom. They stop trusting their own experiences of the world, learning is what you get from a teacher. People can feel so lost whenever they find themselves alone. It is like they never learned how to trust themselves. And then they feel like they have to have things to look important. I still believe that the knowledge found inside of the human heart is the greatest and most powerful of all knowledge, and somehow they need to be teaching this at school, so these kids can truly learn how to grow up.”

My neighbor sat cross legged staring at me, thinking only god knows what.

His unflinching expression started to make me feel uncomfortable and I quickly drank the last of my beer, then reached inside of his cooler for another one, not thinking to ask if it was all right to do so.

”I know what you mean, but how would schools do that. I mean to teach kids how to believe in themselves more, so they don’t get so messed up in life?” He suddenly leaned forward as though I was going to give him a detailed solution.

”People have to learn how to look inside of themselves. The only ways I know of doing this is through prayer, meditation, and dreams. Somehow schools are going to have to get the curriculum to be involved with these things for the benefit of the kids. Otherwise, kids will continue to grow up as nothing more than pawns for the business world. Like wandering shadows, they become people with no real center inside of themselves.”

Chapter Break

”OK if I sit down with you?” It was Joyce Cooper, the Assistant Superintendent who was in charge of the YOP program.

I was sitting alone in the staff dining hall where for a buck sixty a scrawny convict had just piled my meal tray with enough chicken ala king to drown a horse.

”Sure, sit down.” I said while helping her to pull out a chair at my table.

”So, how is the school doing?” She inquired.

”Everything seems to be going fine. Have you heard anymore about the law suit?” I spoke while dunking a biscuit into the chicken ala king and began to stuff it into my mouth.

She began to pour her milk from the carton into a paper cup while replying to my question, “Well, actually I have. The going word in Olympia is that they are going to try to shut the program down.” She then gave me a worried look, as though uncertain about my response.

In a startled move I spoke, “Shut it down? But they only started it this year. My god, they need to give the program a chance.” I stopped eating and only stared at her in dismay.

”The people in DOC know this group of lawyers who are suing the school. They are people who will continue to sue the department at every drop of the hat. DOC has enough law suits as it is from the inmates, so they don’t need any more from the youths also. At least that’s the thinking going on in Olympia.” She drank some milk and looked apprehensively at her chicken ala king.

”But this high school program got started by a law suit. Doesn’t DOC have to provide the kids with an education?” The tone in my voice sounded a bit shook up, uncertain of itself.

”Not if the kids are not here anymore. They could be sent to Green Hill and go to school there also. That is a juvenile detention center. But I’m not sure if the staff there would be happy to see these extreme cases showing up on their doorstep.” She swallowed some chicken ala king, then

stared blankly across the table as though an image was occupying her mind, and then finished, “But they will have to do it; they have no choice.”

”Sounds like you are pretty certain about this.”

She looked directly at me and replied, “You have to remember that this was not a popular program to begin with. DOC took it only because they had to by federal law provide these kids with an education. But now that the legislators see the money going to pay for lawyers things are different. Let JRA take the program and they can pay for the dam lawyers.” Grabbing her cup of milk she drank some down hurriedly.

The tone in her voice had changed suddenly and drastically. It sounded like she would not miss having the kids around, hearing the pattering of their youthful feet up and down the prison corridors. But I could not blame her. The kids had continued to be a difficult lot to manage; they had twice as many fights as the adults, and complained like half starved infants.

”Does Green Hill have the security needed for this kids? I thought we had some here only because Green Hill got tired of dealing with them.” I paused for a moment and then went on, “Didn’t Corbett get charged with staff assault in Green Hill and then came up here?”

Joyce wavered a bit, looked as though she was uncertain of what to say, and then replied, “You have to keep in mind we are dealing with the political types in Olympia. I really don’t think Green Hill would be a good place for some of the extreme kids we have here. You should know

that; you're dealing with many of them in the hole. They may have the body of a teenager, but with the hyperactivity and unpredictable behavior, they can be worse than the adults. But the policy makers only see this stuff in print, and that is how they make their choices." She gave up half way through the chicken ala king and had started forking down the maple cake. Her look had softened and I could sense that she was pleased with it. Desert usually was the best part of the meal.

Deciding that this would be a good time to ask, I spoke as nicely as possible, "What do you think the chances are of getting a job in here working with the K-9 unit?" She looked at me and smiled. I continued, "Could you put in a good word for me?"

Ted, the math teacher, approached me briskly while I was looking over some letters I had just grabbed from my mail box, in the school's copy room. I could tell he was upset by the heated glare emerging from his dark eyes.

"I hear that you're spreading rumors that the school is going to be shut down. I think that before you go around spilling off at the mouth you should check with our boss and find out what really is going on first.

You have always been someone that acts like they don't belong here. Maybe you would be happy to see the school close down. Maybe that is why you are spreading these rumors." He looked at me in a self satisfied manner, glad to have spoken as he did, his back bent toward me, his fiery eyes

checking to see if I was about to explode or not.

I was caught off guard by his reproach. Ted was usually a calm, matter of fact person. But I also knew that his reserve was only an icy one; that beneath the quiet, if not fragile exterior was unharnessed emotion that could erupt involuntarily, and something had just made this man snap.

”Ted, all I told some of the teachers was what Joyce Cooper told me at lunch. If you want to ask Frank about it go ahead. But when I talked him yesterday, he told me that he hadn’t heard anything, but he will check into it.” I shoved the letters back in the box and began to walk out of the copy room, trying to avoid his wrathful stare.

He turned toward me and said, “Listen Cole, I’ve heard some of your talk about schools, and let me tell you. If you don’t like the way schools handle their business than why don’t you just go and quit. I mean, I’m sure you could find a good job as a security guard somewhere.” He then gave a slight chuckle, showing how much he was entertaining himself.

I abruptly stopped at the doorway, turned back to face him and said,

”Ted, sometimes the best way to make healthy changes comes from within.”

Then I walked out and down the hallway, hoping not to hear from him anymore.

”Well, what are going to do if they shut the program down?” said Lisa.

Later that evening I called my wife with the surprising news. “You can always come back home you know.” She sounded sarcastic.

”This is all so unexpected. I don’t know right now. I’ve gotten so use to being in the woods and going on my daily hikes with the dogs; it would be rough living in Seattle. I’d have to drive half an hour just to find a park.” I was speaking while bending down at the waist and blowing into the woodstove to get the fire started.

”You and your dogs. That’s all you think about. I’m not sure if I would want them at home. They poop too much and you don’t clean it up.” The fiery manner in which she spoke, I could smell smoke coming out of the receiver, or perhaps it was the woodstove.

”You know I clean up the poop; at least once a day.” Well, sometimes every two days, but it sounded good.

”It’s not just because I need help with your mom and dad that I want you to come back home. Your mom drives me crazy sometimes and I know she does that to you too. You have to watch her all the time, and I shouldn’t let her go into the kitchen because she grabs food and who knows where her hands have been.” There was a wariness in her voice, and I knew she felt frustrated at times dealing my mother’s growing Alzheimer’s disease.

”And then she just giggles like a little girl when I try to correct her.”

Lisa continued.

I broke in, “I just slap her on the butt. That was what she use to do to me when I was young.” A tone of self-satisfaction echoed in my voice. I went on, “I’m just glad that they are not living in some sterile institution. Especially one of those for-profit nursing homes. My god,

they intentionally herd seniors into those places just to be making money.

That is not real care. Actually it's spooky to think about." The fire in the stove was going and I walked back to the kitchen table to put together my evening bowl of cereal.

Lisa went on, "I don't think your dad has Alzheimer's. He still is pretty alert. Today while he was sitting quietly in the living room I asked him what was on his mind. You know, sometimes he just likes to sit there in his wheelchair looking out the window or he naps for awhile."

My mind quickly flashed an image of dad: a gaunt, white haired, intensely fragile man, his face containing only vague remnants of his earlier good looks, sitting in a large living room chair. He retired twenty years prior from the post office, carried the reputation of a war hero in a small town in North Dakota, having endured the Bataan Death March in the Philippines during World War II, and then raised and saw his three sons through college. The only complaint I could think of regarding his and mom's parenting skills was that they watched too much television.

Lisa continued, "Well, he looks up at me and says, "'I was just wondering how far away those mountains were.'" He was looking at the Cascade mountains on the horizon. Then I said, "'They're probably about twenty miles from here.'" He gets a kind of thoughtful look and then says to me, "'I wish I could go there. They look very beautiful.'" He pauses for a minute and then says, "'That's God's country you know.'" It surprised me that he would say something like that."

”Well, when you get to that age, the middle eighties, you probably think a lot about God. It makes sense to me.” I began to stir powdered milk into a glass of water for my cereal. It came from a large box of powdered milk that was stored away, that I had been keeping for several months and still had not used up.

She went on, “I don’t think he is very religious. I asked him once if he thinks god will take of him, and he told me, “”No. I’ll take care of myself.”” I couldn’t believe it! This is a man who can’t even go to the bathroom alone, but he still believes that he can take care of himself.”

”Dad was always a stubborn man.” I said while turning on my laptop that sat on the kitchen table, preparing to read a couple of local newspapers on the Internet while eating dinner. “Has he bitten mom lately?” I continued. Dad had a nasty tendency to suddenly grab anyone nearby and either twist their hands or bite a finger. This crazed behavior must of been caused by a stroke, or aggravated by his war experiences.

Lisa said, “He bit mom last week. She was just trying to talk to him and she got too close.” Then she went on changing the subject, “Try to figure out a plan on what you’ll do if they close down the school. If you come home we can set up a schedule of caring for your parents, so you don’t feel like I’m taking advantage of you.” It sounded like she was trying to coax me home and I did miss my family.

We finished the conversation with her expressing concern for her wayward daughter, wishing to be an adult, and her whereabouts for the past several

days.

During the evening meal I found an article in the Seattle newspaper that said most senior citizens did not have enough money to pay for their own nursing care, that many of them would become wards of the state.

Chapter Break

”So then the semi-colons mean “and furthermore”, or that there is more you want to say about this topic.” I was showing examples of sentences on the white board in the front of the classroom and there seemed to be a light that just went on in Matt’s eyes as I went on elaborating about the use of commas, semi-colons, and colons. It was a basic lesson in punctuation, but I found so many of the kids did not know how to write using them.

Matt was a tall, thin, white youth with long black hair that looked like it had not been washed in a week. For a teenager he had an amazing thickness of beard, making him look like someone in their mid twenties.

Dressed in the usual beige overalls and chained to the wall and floor while sitting in the metal desk, he seemed to be enduring his situation calmly.

He said, “I understand it when you explain it that way. I think some teachers don’t explain it very well.”

I replied, “Maybe sometimes, but remember in here you don’t have other kids to distract you, and you’re chained up so you can’t be moving around

at will. About the only thing you can do is listen, work, and look out the window occasionally.”

”That’s true.” Matt leaned forward to take another look at his writing. He was sitting next to Brian, who was also chained up to his metal desk just on the other side of the metal partition that divide the two youths. Brian was working quietly on his own.

I said to Matt, “But I think you do have a point about some teachers though. Just last week I was interviewing the kids I have in special education to see how they were doing with their classes and one of the questions I asked all of them was, “what is the best thing the teacher can do to help you learn?” I surprised when most of them said the same thing.

The best thing the teacher can do is simply take the time to sit down with a student and work with them, helping them to understand the schoolwork. Unfortunately most teachers don’t have that kind of time. There are too many kids in class and other things are always going on to distract their attention.”

Matt pulled up an empty chair so he could stick his feet up under the sit, then he leaned forward wrapping his long arms around the tops of his bent knees. He looked at me and said, “A lot of kids like to drive teachers crazy on purpose. Going to school for me was just a time to hang out with my homies.”

I said while leaning back against the counter, “The best thing you can learn in school is how to solve problems. Math is pretty good at doing

that. You have to learn how to think steps: step one, step two, step three. That is exactly how people solve everyday problems: one step at a time.”

Matt turned to look out the window and then said to me, “Kids can bring some pretty big problems to school. I started to abuse drugs at a young age and then hanging out with the gang.”

”I think everyone has their own beast of burden that they have to conquer in life. I got bone cancer in my mid thirties; the doctor told me that I had about a fifty/fifty chance of living, and I lost most of the use of my left arm. At about the same time my wife divorced me. But I was able to remain positive and bounced back. I think the pain I went through has made me a stronger person today. It’s a fact of life: you have to go through the darkness before you can see the light.” I was trying desperately not to preach, but just to use a personal example of an important regarding concerning the lessons of life.

Matt turned around from the window, looked straight at me and said, “So you divorced your wife and now you live with your dogs?”

”That is not exactly the way it went, and I don’t have the time to explain it all. But the fact is that we are all searching for answers in life; and if you know how to ask the right questions it will make the searching a whole lot easier.” I moved away from the counter and stood in the middle of the classroom, directly in front of Matt. Brian was still working quietly not looking up at all.

I went on, feeling a bit frustrated, “Matt, why don’t you try writing a short paragraph on your own now. You understand the main points. Lets see what you can do.”

”OK, OK. But you do live all alone with your dogs, right?” Matt chided, and I could see Brian, with his head still buried in his schoolwork, chuckling to himself.

Suddenly Matt swung his cuffed arm in toward the metal partition and the long, attached chain slammed against it making a loud “bang”.

I scolded “Matt, watched those chains of yours. We all are going to become hard of hearing if you keep slamming them like that.”

”Sorry, sometimes I can’t help it. This things are difficult to manage.”

He replied.

”The way you guys are all wrapped up in chains, just like a pair of ghosts out of a haunted house story.” I said trying to add some humor to the moment.

Matt broke in suddenly, “That’s an idea! I’ll write a ghost story.” He looked at me with an excited grin and started writing. “How to you spell ”ax murderer”.

I could tell that Matt’s field of perceptual thought had not been greatly affected by the classroom discussion. So what, maybe now is not the time for him to wake up and understand the shadows that flicker in his mind, at least I tried. Now, if I could only get him to use commas and periods correctly.

Springtime.

It was such a welcome sight to see the sun returning to the landscape.

Looking back, it had been a long, dark, and cold winter, more than I had anticipated. During the past few weeks I had grown desperate in my wait for the spring warmth. The cold wetness of the Pacific Northwest winter had penetrated me to the bones and I was mentally and physically sick of it. I was tired of sitting in a cold cabin struggling to make a fire out of the wet wood, constantly wearing three layers of clothing, and seeing on every exhaled breath, a small cloud of frost. Even my evening walks had grown wearisome. I could only walk in the rain three days in a row and then I would lose interest and motivation. More than the rain, the constant darkness eventually grew annoying. The perpetual gloom wore away at my resolve like trying to walk wearing a pair of blinders. I feared a terrible sickness would invade my weakened body, like snow clouds falling upon and canceling the warmth of autumn, if the sun did not return soon with its' promise of earthly warmth.

It was shortly after the beginning of March and the skies were clearing, the days noticeably longer, and the moist cold air of winter had vanished.

My body grew stronger with the appearance of the heavenly orb, and my mind was once more reassured by seeing its' radiant light. I knew of no other spring so welcomed in it's arrival. The sword of the sun blazed a glorious trail through the forever deep blue heavens, and the promise of

spring had given me a renewed sense of life.

With the appearance of the large yellowish cloaks of skunk cabbage along the swampy ditches bordering some of the roadsides came the fresh infant buds on the maple and alder trees covering the landscape. Baby deer with their ever present and worrisome mothers could be seen grazing along the county roadways. The abundance of grasses, ferns, weeds, blackberry, salmon berry and goose berry bushes all showed renewed strength and vibrancy. Even the ancient tree stumps, slowly dissolving from years of exposure, gave signs of rebirth in the fresh growth of seedlings struggling to raise themselves up from their ever slumbering but nurturing parents.

It was approaching the end of March and I had just driven into my driveway and gotten out of the truck when I heard the sound of distant chainsaws. It was not the single saw sound I had heard on numerous occasions during the winter, of a neighbor preparing their firewood. This was distinctly different and incomprehensible, coming from the direction of the forest where I take my daily hikes.

After changing back into my sweats, unleashing the dogs and entering into the woods, I wandered down the trail to where I could hear the roar of chainsaws. The sun gave out a fresh and vibrant warmth that had spread throughout the greening forest. The Sol Duc river churned turbulently with its' glacier fed, turquoise colored waters. With a lighter, piled

vest replacing my gortex parka, I walked contentedly watching the process of rebirth in the forest.

I had emerged from the woods a mile from the cabin and walking down a rural road when I saw a truck parked just off the pavement and along side the river. Trotting ahead of me, my dogs barked, revealing a young adult who had erected a small tent and was camping behind the vehicle.

”Hey, how are you doing?” Spoke the young man.

Taken surprised by his directness and friendliness, he walked out of the bushes and on to the road to stand next to me. Dressed in a flannel shirt and blue jeans, needing a shave and perhaps a bath, he scrutinized me as much as I did him. Uncertain of his motives, I stopped to engage in conversation, watching him cautiously for any quick threatening movements.

He was a stranger, conducting himself in a strange manner.

”Do you live around here.” He questioned.

So to not divulge too much personal information I said, “Down the road, through the woods.”

”Have you seen any other people around here lately?” He looked at me in a very uncertain manner, making me feel even more on edge.

”No.” I just nodded my head.

The young man turned to look at his make-shift camp site and said, “I’ll be out here for awhile. I work for the King lumber and I’ve got some guys up there in the woods cutting trees down. I’m here to watch the road and our equipment for any radicals who may want to harass us.”

I could still hear the sound of chainsaws in the distance and asked,
"Where are your men?"

He pointed straight up toward the mountainside, "They're up there. They'll be cutting for a couple of weeks, hitching up the logs, and then we've hired a Chinook helicopter to come in and haul the wood down to the road where it'll be loaded on trucks."

Finally it all sunk in and I felt stunned, as though hearing that the river had jumped its' course and will soon begin flooding across my property. The world as I knew it suddenly had changed and vanished before my eyes. My private haven of woods was about to fall down and a feeling of angry rose up in its' place. How could this be?

"But this is all National Forest property? I didn't think logging was allowed in here?" I was sure the hurt could be heard in my voice, giving me away to the young man as a environmental sympathizer, if nothing else.

"Back in the late eighties Clinton signed a bill saying that National Forest was to allow logging to continue yearly on a limited basis only. So this year King logging won the bid for cutting and this is where we're working." His body seemed to relax with the discussion, sensing that I was no threat. Continuing on, "I've been logging for eight years now, and have seen people killed by falling trees. It's a rough business I won't wish on anyone. But you get a town like Forks, way out in the country, how else can people make any money?"

With this statement I perceived the threat to the woods in a different

light. Logging was one of the most dangerous of jobs, but to support their families, these men would do it. The trees would fall, wildlife suffer, and more of humanities natural heritage vanish, but there were innumerable evils conducting business in the world, what would a few trees matter?

I said, "People use to be able to make good money out here. But I think they got greedy and over harvested the oceans and forests. Now there isn't much left anymore." I saw ecological concerns as being problems associated with human nature. When people grope in the darkness for a personal sense of redemption, as a way to strengthen their lives, they tend to grab the gold, even if it is only fools' gold. I continued, "Maybe someday people will learn to take care of themselves, rather than their bank accounts. I think there is hope only if we decide to educate them in a better way. People tend to live in ways that they've been taught; unfortunately, Americans have been taught to over value material things." Feeling a surge of anger once again rise inside of me, I quickly ignored it and decided to listen for his response.

"Well, like I said, we'll be out here for a couple of weeks. Hope the Chinook helicopter doesn't drive you crazy. It'll be flying right over your place all day long." He looked at me as though it all didn't matter; it was simply the course of business.

I walked away feeling despondent and angry, my dogs circling aimlessly ahead of me. Even with the rationalizations of greed and the darkness of

the human soul, I would miss my clean looking forested mountainside. What once was pure and whole would now become deeply scarred. The wilderness had just slipped one more notch into nothingness, and my cabin solitude would be overrun with logging crews. Great! I felt bitter thinking about man's ever greedy destruction of natural habitat. When will enough be enough and some semblance of natural balance restored to our society? Feeling frustrated that I could never answer these or other poignant questions pertaining to quality of life issues, I went back to the cabin, searched the Internet for a couple of environmental activist web sites, and through them I started emailing concerns to various representatives in the government, determined that my one small voice in the wilderness would be heard.

Cabin as community/education

After living in a cabin for several months and having to deal with the mice, occasional rat and on a couple of nights I awoke to see a bat winging its' way around a darkened cabin. One late winter day the dogs must of discovered a skunk beneath the cabin, one that I had been hearing scratching loudly during the past few weeks; because when I returned home from work in the afternoon the rank odor of a skunk had permeated most of the cabin's interior. As evidenced by the digging around the cabin the dogs must of scared the animal into spraying. It took a couple of days to air it out, and later on I mistakenly wore a coat to work that needed washing; some of the teaching staff said they noticed a strange skunk-like

smell in the hallway soon after I arrived. Squirrels also had a tendency to inhabit the attic of the cabin. On numerous occasions as I sat working on the computer or watching a video, the sudden scampering of little feet, shaking the thin plywood ceiling of the kitchen and living room, could be heard. If the dogs were indoors they would rise from their slumbers and look curiously upwards. Other times Orion would stand with his lean, muscular body and point his wet nose down on to the floor, taking in long steady drafts of air from a variety of gaps between the logs. He would do this numerous times as though smelling and forming a mental picture of a particular animal that inhabited the space below the cabin.

But these were all animals of the forest, and I could expect such companions, for the forest was where I desired to live. It was all a reminder that the woods were a living, breathing community of plants and animals that had co-existed, in one shape or another, since the beginning of time. For whatever reason, only man saw himself as being separate and superior to this “sacred hoop” of life. In contradiction to this I wanted to use the cabin as a doorway into the natural community and from there learn by using the wilderness as a source of insight and inspiration.

By early spring I began to have strong feelings about the “community” that inhabited the old log cabin. Perhaps I was starting to develop feelings of family or kinship, being removed from my own family, but one day while sitting eating my evening cereal, I imagined the structure being similar to Noah’s Ark. This came about with my latest philosophical idea that all

the various creatures that come and go through its' weathered boundaries were considered by myself and by nature, as equals. In this wilderness version of socialism, the smallest of ants had the same rights and privileges as any other creature. It even got to the point when I found a spider for example, instead of squashing it, I would carry and deposit it out of doors. Somehow I had also acquired the belief that I should not kill unless my own life was threatened. That all creatures contained an equal share of life, and it was not my place to deny it to them. In regards to the cabin, like Noah's Ark, I simply entered the place to stay warm and keep out of the rain, eat a meal, relax and sleep. How many of the other creatures who inhabit the structure, unbeknownst to me, did the same. The old logs of the aged building still belong more to the forest than to any one else.

Chapter Break

I walked on to the education floor early, planning on time alone, preparing lessons. My waffle soled boots squeaked loudly as I stepped down the heavily waxed floor. Immediately I sense that the beige colored corridor was going to be comfortably quiet. Not having many students I went through my attendance list as I sat at my desk, hoping to find work for each one. But often what I had planned was not what they ended up doing. For any one of a thousand reasons, they would rebel and want something else. Perhaps it was an oppositional defiance disorder, or a

personality disorder, or just being in prison too long and still being a teenager who was seeking whatever freedom possible. So I will discuss reasonable options, and the credit that may be earned with various assignments, which is based on the daily credit of .007. If one multiplied that number by the 180 days in an average school year, it should come close to one whole credit. Sometimes if the student is motivated they will accept a large textbook completion assignment just to get ahead faster. If it is something that they can work on independently I have seen them go through a huge workbook alone in their cells in only a couple of days. With nothing else to do, they will concentrate on finishing it even if it takes all day and night. A number of times I found myself giving out work that I would think should take them a month to do, so I will give them a months worth of credit when finished, only to have them return it to me done, in a couple of days. It was embarrassing. "Hey, Cole, you're busy?" The words startled me because I was thinking that no one else was around; I turned and saw the school counselor. It was his job to assign students to classes and keep track of who had earned what credit. He was a thin man in his early fifties, a large bald spot on his head, and was generally easy to humor. He had just stuck his head in my doorway and obviously wanted to talk, so we did.

There was a serious note to his demeanor, so I knew listening would be important, "We got a new kid and he's special ed. The name is Jeremy Logan. But there's a problem here. He was convicted of rape and the

other kids know about it. I just found out this past weekend, man, he just got here last Friday, well, anyway, by Sunday the COs found him hanging in his cell. They thought he was dead at first, but I guess a day in the hospital convinced them he was all right. I was told he is scared to death of coming to school, as you could imagine. The guard I talked to said it wasn't a suicide attempt, but they don't know who did it either. But any ways, I was thinking of putting him in your first period class, moving the other students out into your other classes, so this kid can be with you alone. Then after that period he can go back to his cell, and maybe do some homework, or whatever. But he can't be going to school with other the kids."

"Well, if he has an IEP I need to serve him. You got his file?" I said.

"It's in my office." He gestured down the hallway with his hand.

"Boy, I wonder how long he's goin last, before he gets too scared and wants to PC up (protective custody). I mean he may never want to come out."

The counselor leaned against the door frame saying, "I don't know. But it seems he really wants to go to school. Maybe he's afraid of being alone in his cell all day." The counselor stuck his hand in his pocket and I could hear him fumbling around with some coins. He was a nervous sort of man who needed to be busy. Working only on Monday's and Wednesday's, because of the small school needs and the fact that he had retired from working in private schools for the past thirty odd years, and when he was

seen, he always had a pile of papers in hand. He car pooled with other school staff from Port Angeles, a hour drive daily down often icy and all too curvy roads.

”I wonder,” starting to reflect more deeply on the situation at hand, “if he does PC up completely, if I’m still going have ta teach him. I don’t think they’d want me going to his cell for that. But these special education laws can be pretty strange sometimes. You know, if a kids can’t come to school, you still have to find a way to teach them.” The concept of how these laws would be carried out in such a uncompromising and brutal environment as a maximum security prison started in weigh deeply on me. I could just see it, me, all alone, teaching phonics in a 8 by 14 foot cell to some kid convicted of rape and murder, waiting at anytime to be knifed by a peer. I hope the guards keep the light on and the door open.

The next morning, the first period of the day, Jeremy walks into my classroom. He is a pale, thin, and scared looking white kid, barely seventeen years old. My immediate impression when seeing him is to think of a lamb amongst a pack of wolves. His brown hair is combed straight back and looked like it had not been washed for a week. Maybe he was afraid of the shower, I thought. But there was no smell so he had been doing some washing. On closer examination I can see a bruise encircling his neck in a curved line, and a sick feeling sinks into my stomach. Here was a kid struggling for his life and I am suppose to teach him reading skills. What else, maybe some consumer math, how to make change, just in

case he makes it back to the outside world in ten years and wants to buy a burger. I tell him to sit down in front of my desk because he was my only student. His skin was so pale it almost had a bluish tint and his lips look too purplish, as though he had been out in the cold. Wearing a white T-shirt, beige pants (no belt), and tennis shoes, he grabs a chair and places it in front of the desk. There was no affect to his demeanor at all, no expression on the face, the hollow eyes only looked down. He sat down, placed a folder of paper on my desk and looked at me as though expecting a punch in the nose. Again, I wonder how long it would be before he PC up and no longer came to school, before the wolves found their prey, stirring him to panic and seek only escape. I did not want to think about his victims; I decided beforehand with these inmates to take my job only one nightmare at a time.

”How are ya doin today?” Saying this to try to loosen him up.

”OK”, giving a flat response, and not even looking at me.

”What kind of stuff do you like to read?” I was looking at him directly in the eyes.

”Science fiction is ok,” he paused a little as though to continue, but only a stony silence arose.

”Do you write letters?” I was still trying to get him to loosen, maybe even begin to open up to me. But I can sense the tightness that prevented him from communicating. It is as though he has been sworn to secrecy by a militant organization and any violation could be met with extreme violence.

”Not lately.”

I handed him a packet that I copied from a workbook, and I had used his past test scores to determine if he would be able to read it. It was copied from a book on ancient stories, about a native chief who was given a charm that protected him from the enemies arrows. Unfortunately, another member of the tribe stole it from him and then shoot him with an arrow, killing the young chief. But the powers of the charm continued none the less because the chief was reborn as a beautiful green and red jungle bird with a long multicolored feathered tail. I had selected the story because I thought it was a beautiful illustration of the process of redemption and that people who have loss so much in their lives needed to believe in it. Though one can lose everything, even ones’ own sanity or life, by the very nature of the universe, it can be returned to you, in an even greater form. That there was a force greater than ourselves that rules with a wisdom greater than our own.

There was a nervous, faltering uncertainty in his voice and I had to help him sound out many of the words while reading the short three page story. As other kids learning how to read, when I hear them speaking, reading out loud and trying pronounce strange new words with the usual glitches, I felt it was like seeing baby learning how to walk, including having to fall down and feeling some pain and frustration. But instead of bruising a knee I could tell that his mistakes were deeper, more like real cuts, slicing into his fragile sense of self confidence, perhaps making him feel

that his chances of becoming anything other than “sick” or “wrong” were being washed away.

He visibly relaxed and sat back in his chair when he finished reading the story. While he was laying the book on the desk, as though to be rid of it, I asked him, “So what is a charm?”

”I don’t know. I guess something that helps people.” He spoke blankly.

”Did you ever have a good luck piece?” I said trying to build a solid idea of what charms were in his mind.

”Yeh, it was a rabbits foot my cousin gave me.” Speaking with his eyes in a painful downcast.

”Did you believe it would give you any luck?”

”Yeh, maybe a little bit.” He started to pick at a scab on his right hand, still avoiding me.

”So you probably felt a little bit more powerful from having the rabbit’s foot. Right?” I spoke up a little and tried to look more intently at him, hoping he would return it.

”Yeh.” The tone in his voice contained the sound of a desperate plea, like a secretive breath that had escaped his lungs. I could tell he did not like my attention.

”But if you believe in it a lot, then you would have felt a lot more powerful, right?” I needed to pick at his brain in order to unlock his resistance.

”I guess so.” A stern quality had entered his voice.

”Do you think the charm helped Quetzal to believe in himself, especially when he needed it the most, when he went to war?” I was still looking steadfastly into his eyes, trying to fathom meaning from them.

”Yeh.” the sound of a plea in his voice had vanished now, only a sad hopelessness could be hear.

”Athletes often have their own good luck charms, that supposedly help them to win. I have heard that even some of the best athletes in the world use them.” I paused a moment to ponder my next move, to think of the next question for him. “Why do you think they would want a good luck piece when they have already won so much?”

”I don’t know.” He gave me a quick look as though to say, “how much longer are you going to be torturing me like this?”

Here was a kid who had an intensive, hard edged shell around himself and was not going to open up anytime soon. He continued to sit in his chair next to my desk, his skinny extremely pale arms folded across his chest, eyes staring downwardly, looking and probably feeling like he was dangling over a pit of poisonous vipers. That it was only a matter of time before one would bite him.

I paused to think and then decided to change my approach, “What do you want to be in life?” This would give me a chance to show an interest in him.

He looked at me, “I don’t know,” and shrugged.

”What are you interested in, there has to be something: cars, sports,

reading, what?"

"I like animals. My mom use to have a dog and she let me keep a hamster, but it died." He started to look at the distant wall and a calm gaze appeared on his face, while his mind raced back to earlier days at home with mother.

"Pets can help people to feel good about themselves. I've got two dogs just to keep me company," I was trying to speak in a humorous tone of voice.

He looked straight at me said, "My mom's dog was always fun to be around. He use to jump up on my bed and wake me up in the morning." I thought a slight sparkle may of been seen in his eyes at this point. Good memories helped to open him up.

We began to exchange stories about our dogs for a few minutes, and gradually he seemed to be relaxing and to feel more comfortable. He looked at me more often and even seemed to be sitting more straight in his chair. Gradually, I felt confident that a sparkle had appeared in his eyes and that I was no longer Mr. Enemy. That was when I knew I had him.

"Have you thought about being a veterinarian or an animal trainer?"

"Yeh, but I really don't know. I don't like having to go to school that much."

If he did not want me to act as a parent I could still act like a concerned parent, so I said, "Well, you are always going to have to think about your future, even in prison. You going to have to deal with

tomorrow somehow.”

He shrugged his shoulders and said, “I know. My mother said she would help me go back to school.”

”No matter what happens, always believe a decent future is possible. I remember an old rock and roll record I use to listen to when I was a teenager. One of the things they said that I’ll never forget:” I aimed a pencil at him to emphasize the point, “in the end you will be what you want to be.” I paused again to see if he understood me. “Remember when I said that those athletes carried charms? That was so they could more easily believe in themselves becoming a winner. Even though they were already winners doesn’t mean that they were going to continue to win again and again. They still have to work at it, be challenged by it, and sometimes lose. But they do not want to stop believing in themselves as winners. So that is why they have the good luck charms.”

He looked down and didn’t say anything. Perhaps I over did it. I had started to teach, if not preach, and he hates to feel like just another student in class. He needs more from me than that.

”So what’s a good goal for you to have in life?”

”I don’t know; I just want to get out of prison.” He said looking at me as though I was stupid.

”I know that. But let me see,” I looked up at the ceiling searching for an idea. “I bet you want to be happy, feel safe, and to enjoy some basic freedoms like watching TV, talking to friends, and buying things every now

and then, right?"

"Yeh. I want to see my girlfriend too."

"Now be honest with me, do you believe that you can take care of yourself, even though you may enter a war zone, like Quetzal did?"

"I don't know."

"Do you think that you can believe in something like a charm so strongly that your fear of enemies would not affect you much anymore? A charm that works to protect not just your body, like it did protecting Quetzal from the arrows, but it would also serve to protect your soul, like when he died and was transformed into a beautiful jungle bird?"

"Maybe." He was looking down again, but this time I felt that he was thinking about what I had just said.

"I think that is what the story is trying to tell us: no matter what happens in life, even if you get shot by an arrow and die, if you believe in something good, strongly enough, good things will happen to you, perhaps even after death. But you have to believe." This was what I wanted him to remember from the lesson. I paused to see if he had taken in and was digesting any of it, but no obvious signs were seen. His body and posture looked as limp as a worm on the end of a hook.

We spent the next few minutes talking about and assessing his skills in math. Like many street kids, he knew some of the basics like multiplying and dividing, but that was it. His enthusiasm for advancing any academic skill was as bright as a starry sky in a nightly dust storm.

I was just about to give up for the day, having had him in my room for nearly two hours when a voice spoke out unexpectedly from behind me, “Can I see Jeremy in my office?” We had been working another reading assignment for the past half an hour when the psychologist stuck her head in my room. She saw numerous kids, hoping to help them overcome their assortment of psychological problems. Being the special education teacher we would often share information on certain students. But I felt Jeremy was one who had walked off the deep end and probably won’t be swimming back any time soon. And as so many of the other kids in prison did, they always knew what to say or not to say when talking to staff.

Jeremy looked up at me stiffly, as though he did not want to go, not saying anything.

”It’s OK Jeremy, it shouldn’t take long. I just want to see how you have been doing lately.” She gave him a smile and paused for his response. Being a short, mildly overweight woman with short, gray, curly hair, and probably been working as a psychologist for the past twenty years, I felt that she would be able to see beyond any desperate attempts at deception.

”It’s OK Jeremy, she doesn’t bite. We’ll talk again tomorrow.” I spoke and began putting away my classroom materials.

Jeremy finally got up and walked out the door with the psychologist.

What a long and difficult road that boy had to walk in life, I thought

while preparing for the next class of youths. And he probably did not even know that there was a road from which to walk and find guidance. The way he acted he was still wandering in circles through the dark woods.

Chapter Break

(Logging begins, helicopter overhead, clear cutting but leaving a few trees, denuding of the mountainside, one-man in machine cutting (on level ground) about seven hundred dollars in one tree, taking away the life connection to the landscape, why does government feel the need for statues of its leaders?, it is to increase peoples' process of identification with the government, to show its' humanness (if not humanity), trees bring the landscape to life, they help to open the doors of the spirits that lay between people and their landscapes. For whatever reason many white culture does not appreciate the bond between people and landscape.

It was a warm, dry Saturday afternoon toward the end of March and the forest was experiencing a full springtime revival. (describe?)

Every other weekend I still got to stay at the cabin, rather than be heading home to care for my parents and giving Lisa time off. These weekends, even in the dead of cold winter, were enjoyable: mostly because I did not have to drive three to four days to and from Seattle, plus I had plenty of time to work on my writing.

"Man, you've been working on that truck ever since I moved out here. It

must be in great shape by now.” I had heard my neighbor working in his garage and decided to go for a visit. As I was walking up the driveway when I spotted a pair of dirty, oily pants squirming underneath the rear end of his aging Ford pickup. When his head poked out behind a rear tire, looking up at me, I added sarcastically, “You must enjoy tormenting yourself with these machines.”

”Sure saves a lot of money.” Abruptly he disappeared back beneath the truck, and then I heard him continue, “At least I’m not throwing away eight hundred bucks every year on problems that don’t get fixed! Thank God long gone my papa taught me how to take care of myself and my family.”

”Hey, it’ not my fault the flywheel went out on me, and I don’t think even you could have replaced it on your own.” Speaking defensively.

”Ah, you just try me. Last year between my son and me, we put a whole new engine in his truck. It took us a couple of days but we did it.” His voice was so full of pride that you could of chopped it up for firewood.

”Hey,” he pulled himself out from under the truck and stood up, “Speaking about getting some work done, you know maybe we can get some wood from those loggers and use it to rebuild that water box up on the creek. That thing is getting pretty old and shaky.” He grabbed an old rag and started to wipe his hands clean of oil.

I said, “Yeh. Whenever you are ready, let me know and I’ll help ya.”

He went on, “It shouldn’t take more than a couple hours on the weekend.”

Then turning around he darted toward the large tool covered workbench in

the back of his garage and began to rummage through various piles of hardware.

I followed him and then took a sit near the wood stove, which hadn't been fired up. There was a pause in our conversation as I watched him return and crawled back underneath his truck. The silence suddenly grew uncomfortable until I spoke. "I sure hate to see them cutting all those trees down. Everyday after work I use to enjoy looking at the whole south side of Synder Ridge and see how pristine it looked with nothing but fir trees covering it. It was just a blanket of green along the entire range.

But now it has this large bald spot right in the middle of it. I know it might sound childish, but it really does mess up the view."

His booming voice could be heard calling out, "Look at the positive side of it. The clear cut areas will encourage more deer and elk to come in and browse. We should be getting more wildlife around here." A short pause and then, "Ouch!" Something hard hit the ground, and then, "Dam it! Can you hand me a rag?"

I bent down and tossed him one from the workbench and went on, "You know what it reminds me of every time I see one of these clear cut areas: a woman with all her hair cut off. Like the Germans use to do back in the World War II to the Jewish women. Nature is like a beautiful woman, but when people cut all the trees down like that, they are leaving nature with nothing, not even her own sense of dignity."

There was a strain in his voice and I knew he was working hard, but he

replied, “Well, that maybe taking things a bit too far. I use to do a lot of logging and it helped me to raise a family. Back then there was hundreds of miles of forest that no one really cared about, but the logging companies. Of course that did not last long. So people lost their jobs and moved on. The sad thing about logging is that once you cut a tree down you have to wait fifty years before you can get work and cut it down again.”

I knelt down next to the rear of the truck and spoke, “Just think of it; you’ve cut down many trees, so maybe you’ll understand. There is this large beautiful fir tree, maybe sixty feet tall and it has been standing there in the wind for nearly fifty years, just minding its’ own business. Then suddenly a small creature with a chainsaw creeps up on it and then bam! it finds itself cut off from its’ own roots and falling horribly into this dark void called the ground. Now, think about it, if you were god do you think you would hear a scream on the way down?” I paused to see if he would laugh at me or not.

The neighbor gave a couple of grunts and then a soft moan, focusing more on his work than on my last comment, “Now you’re getting weird.” He finally said. “You’ve been hanging out with those kids in the hole too long.” He threw something metal on the ground and started to squirm out from under the truck.

I stepped back away toward the rear of the garage and replied, “You’re probably right. Most people live in the cities now days, and they think

they can just create their own environment and live there. Nature is something you find in a park. I think nature is like a community of spiritual elders that watches, contemplates, and then decides what tomorrow will bring for us. No matter where you live you can't get away from it. It's the crow that flies by your car, but it is also the essence of time and opportunity. The more we can give to it, the more it will give in return." When I finished I sat back down near the wood stove. "Sounds like you've been getting pretty religious lately" He pulled himself up and started to walk towards me.

I leaned back in the chair and said, "You know my wolf-dog, Orion. He is the most loving, caring, and intelligent dog I've ever had. But I've seen him kill a raccoon without batting an eye. So can a lot of other animals in the wild. Why is that? Why did god invent such blood thirsty creatures? I swear with a lot of these animals, they would rather pick a fight than eat! I mean this goes back to the beginning of time. The wilderness, like the forest, is based on things dying and then other things are given life from the decay. Than look at the idea of Christ. He died for our sins, so we could find salvation and live. That is pretty much the way it is in the forest. The heroes, the ones with the rich souls, die so others can receive life from them. Death, when seen correctly, is a divine form of sacrifice that benefits others. Even these trees are getting cut down and dying so that humans can have homes to live in. But what is sad here is that humans haven't been taught to honor the

sacrifice that others have given. All that pain and hard work is simply taken for granted by those who directly benefit from it. Death, like suffering, has lost its' meaning and significance. There are no more heroes. To many people Christ does not represent the importance of sacrifice in our world as much as he does the idea of salvation. That way a lot of people can feel more comfortable with their easy, taken for granted lives.

The neighbor sat down in a chair on the other side of the woodstove, crossed his legs and spoke, "Boy, this religious thing has got you going. When did this happen?" He gave me a smile.

"I guess you can do a lot of thinking when you live alone in the woods."

He reached into his ice-cooler, grabbed a beer and tossed me one, then said, "Well, I agree with you that life ought to be a challenge, but people need to be able to get some satisfaction out of it too. It can't all be pain and suffering. We weren't all made out to be heroes."

I blew off some dirt on the top of the can and then opened it, "Yeh, I know what you mean. I read a book back in the early seventies called, "A Nation of Sheep". I forgot who wrote it, but I can still see it. America is like a nation of sheep, living in a land populated with wolves. I think the Indians understood it, bad things happen for a reason, like my bone cancer. It was a rude awakening, but it was worth it to have my eyes opened. These kids in prison. Many of them need to open their eyes. If they don't they've got a life behind bars waiting for them. Their mental

prison will become the real thing. I think that is what the wolves are for. They attack the sheep to help wake them up, so they don't take things for granted. The victims die so the others can find a greater sense of life. I'm afraid otherwise, the way people live, it is nothing but garbage in garbage out and what ever comes around goes around." I took a long drink of beer, feeling like I had just spilled my gut out.

Thoughts sometimes just collect in the back of my brain and I can only release them through verbal expression, regardless of what the listener may think. I sat back and waited for the neighbors response.

He also took a long drink from his beer, looked up at me and then down towards his feet, "Ha, I think you may have a point there. Sometimes good lessons can come from bad things. Life is pretty precious to just waste away." He took another drink. I could tell from a painful flare in his eyes that he had started to think about the death of his daughter.

Perhaps we should change the topic I thought; or maybe it was time for me to leave.

"Well, all the talk in the world isn't going to save those trees.

There's big bucks wrapped up in them and for that reason they are coming down." He gave me a hard look, knowing I would agree with him.

"You know that old saying, ""If a tree fell in the forest and no one saw or heard it, did it really fall?"" I spoke giving him a weak smile.

"He, what about it?"

I sat up straight in my chair and said, "Well, there are people like

trees falling all time in this world and barely anyone notices. Some woman in Canada, I heard it on the radio, was screaming for her life because she was being attacked. A whole block of people heard her screams and no one even called the police!”

He shrugged, “OK, so what?”

”Well, don’t you see? People can be extremely blind to the suffering of others, just like they can be to the sacrifices made by others. These trees are dying for people who refuse to recognize their deaths. It is like building a church for people who do not believe in Christ.” I was starting to feel a bit exasperated and sat forward in my chair.

I went on, “Listen, all I’m trying to say is that people should not be living like sheep. America is the richest country in the world, able to afford the best education imaginable, and all we seem to be doing is feed our own stomachs; fattening up for God only knows what.”

”We’re getting fat to better please those marauding wolves. You can never tell when one might come knocking on your door.” He chuckled and began wiping his dirty hands on a rag.

Far off in the distance woods came the faint sound of a chainsaw and the cracking of a tree.

Tony sat next to the wall, in the black metal desk, chained up like Houdini about to attempt another fabled dive into a large water tank. A pensive mood could be felt coming from the youth as I watched him at his

desk, where he looked out the window sporadically and worked slowly but steadily on some geography worksheets. He was a small, thin youth with a long black pony tail and pimples that were scattered randomly across his usually solemn face. Being the only student I had the first hour of the day, the classroom was unusually quite and peaceful. He seemed to be soaking in the tranquillity of the room and enjoyed watching the adult prisoners walking across the courtyard, going to their scheduled classes and duties.

Sitting at my table, I knew that Tony tended not to talk very much, perhaps feeling too self-conscious to speak freely with adults. Being in the hole twenty-three hours every days, seven days a week, for the past couple of months, I did not mind him looking out the window; he probably needed a reminder that there was still a large, living, breathing world on the outside; and that somehow he was still a part of it.

Sitting in my chair, I looked to the right casually at a thick and long spider plant that had been in the classroom since the start of the year. It surprised me to notice that on one of its' long shoots overhanging the table it sat on, a small white blossom with an orange center had emerged. It looked so beautiful but fragile, nearly floating in mid air, begging all the world to see its' simple grandeur. It was the only blossom I remembered ever seeing on the plant.

Then soon afterwards, while looking through the classroom windows, I saw the clouds just above the distant prison walls turn a crisp crimson and

fiery purple. Suddenly the sun poked its' beams of golden light through a lazy loaf shaped cloud, radiating upwardly from a center that was still hidden behind the far prison buildings. It was a beautiful sunrise, one that was rarely seen from any classroom. Swiftly the clouds turned an incandescent cardinal red and they seemed to joyously applaud the appearance of the advancing orb; meanwhile the sun's flaming shafts of light shot out wildly and continued to slice through the diverse layers of clouds as freely as wolf fangs through rabbit fur.

"That's a nice looking sunrise. Do you see it?"

Tony twisted his body around far to his right to look out the window in that direction to see it.

"Yeh. That looks nice." He spoke in a flat tone.

I wanted to say more but stopped. In my heart I felt an important lesson emerging that I would love to be able to teach; something about life, death, and the nature of beauty. Important lessons that we should be teaching our children but do not; perhaps because we are too worried about test scores and state funding.

I looked out of the same window Tony had been looking through and saw the lines of inmates heading their adult education classes, probably a GED program. Tony liked to watch them to see if he recognized any.

"Don't they have a college over there?" He asked.

"Yeh, it's call Peninsula College. They have some vocational classes." I replied.

Tony became quiet and went back to his worksheets, while I continued to think. The feet of these kids need to be firmly planted in the ground before they can live with their heads up in the clouds. They should have a firm perspective on life and natural processes before trying to understand the artificial constructions of human society, like politics, geography, and economics. The universe, which contains so many different voices to listen to, has so much more to offer a youth than what one could ever read in a textbook. It should somehow be a part of their education. The glory of the sunrise had died down and the horizon now became a bland assortment of gray clouds and a faded blue sky. The sun rose upwards and its' harsh beams of light blazed through a corner window striking and blinding me so that I had to move my chair to the right in order to see. Abruptly Tony stopped his work and turned toward me saying, "Do they have a computer class over there."

I thought for a moment and said, "No, I don't think so. But I do know that they have a electronics class. That's where they fix people's TVs and radios."

"Oh," he said quietly. "Are all those people going to education?" The line of inmates going into the building opposite our own building had grown longer and about twenty-some men of various ages were lined up there, all wear beige clothing.

"Some probably work in the prison laundry, which is located in that building also." I stood up from my chair and moved closer to the window.

Tony grew quiet again, and I did not think he would be asking many more questions for awhile. He tended to be a pensive youth.

Though prison was a small world, with clear expectations, Tony still had the much larger, real world to struggle with and understand. The nature of life and the land is not something that one can dissect into a neat, tidy analytical chart or political map and teach it on the blackboard.

Seeing him chained and imprisoned, I felt that education should do more than give kids skills to find a job; it should nurture them for life, like watering a plant, helping it to blossom and not waste away. Educators of all people should know that when it comes to knowledge, the circle, like the sun, was always greater than the sum of its parts; and when it comes to humanity and politics, the meek shall inherit the earth. What more was there to teach?

"Are you interested in computers?" I asked for lack of any better to say.

"Not really. I just thought they might have a class over there."

"It's good to find what your interests are and start following them." I

paused a moment. "How much more time do you have?"

"About four years. But I've already done two years." Tony said.

"That's not too bad." I replied. Many of the other youths in prison had more time than that, even as much as forty or fifty years. From the way he said it, it sounded like he had a light at the end of his tunnel.

"I use to watch videos made by a famous scholar who studied all the myths of the world. Joseph Campbell was his name. His advise to young people

was to follow your bliss. I think what he meant by that was to follow what your heart found to be the most meaningful. Don't cheat yourself into doing what you think other people expect. Find what it is that enriches your life and stick to it."

"Girls and cars. That is what I like." Tony said with a chuckle.

"Well, I think once you get more serious about living, you'll see things a bit differently." I walked up to his desk and looked out the window over his shoulder. The sky had a wind-blown look to it and the clouds were long stretched out bands of bluish-gray looking like giant airborne feathers that had been dislodged from a passing mythic bird. In the courtyard near the window a small band of crows were searching through the moist grass, walking as though wearing stilts.

I sat back in my chair and continued to feel frustrated about my inability to articulate much of what I wished to teach. Classrooms, I felt, tended to have a contrived nature to them and consequentially blocked out the bigger lessons in life; the experience of the teacher took precedence over the experience of the student. One could focus on detailed information well, but the lessons learned from community and environmental involvement were missing. Looking at Tony, I knew it would be difficult for many kids to learn how to say no to cheating, stealing, drugs or sex, from teachers who did not even remotely know the life of their students, much less care; it was this fact alone that made it so easy for kids to disconnect themselves in school, if not simply drop-out. Many kids really

do not care because they know that life does not begin or end inside of classrooms. I was one myself while growing up. The real education begins when you step outside the doors and see which way the wind blows. I continued to watch the sun roll through the morning sky in a fiery blaze, ascending on its' predictable path of daily duty. Maybe if I knew a good Native story about the birth and death of the sun I could discuss it with Tony, but I knew of no such thing. Then I wondered how many other teachers had similar moments of seeing a natural wonder occurring and wishing that it could become a teachable lesson? Such moments were valuable in classrooms. Nature is so full of such lessons. But I was going to have to confine my material to what could be seen by chained students through a thick prison window.

Chapter Break

It was an early morning drive through a gray assemblage of rain showers and infrequent sunlight; the highway resembled a swamp where one had to skip over numerous pools to regain footing on solid ground; meanwhile I forcefully gripped the steering wheel to prevent any hydroplaning into the wet, weedy ditch.

The perpetually drenched woods in the surrounding mountains bristled and swayed under the torrent of rain; while within the uplands, various stream filled hollows would exhale a swirl of steam, like vapor from a volcano vent, that would slowly twist and turn in the cool air, as white robed dancers, veiled melancholy maidens of the mist, whose only intent was to

leap into prominence and then gradually dissolve into the moist morning sky. While farther above, the series of mountain tops was blanketed under a single impenetrable cloud that looked like a huge sail that had blown off a passing ship, only to land among the fir trees with several torn remnants scattered across the rugged peaks and valleys, each tattered piece drifting languidly in the wind. Directly ahead on the highway, slowly crossing the road and only about eighty feet above the ground a long and battle scarred cloud was dumping its' last load of sea born moisture. With a shape somewhat like an alligator head, it was preparing itself reluctantly for the inevitable oblivion that all rain clouds must face. More grayish than white, only shreds of mists remained holding it together, while playful winds worked to smoothly render it back into a breezy blue emptiness.

Seeing this panorama of primordial performance, I thought it was the perfect landscape for mysticism. Both the concrete and subtle forces of the world were readily exposed for ones' analysis. The ever evolving weather gave as good a show as the local bald eagles or orca whales. The mixture of cloud, fog, mist, and rain lent a special character to the life enhancing waters of the land. The same water that falls upon and feeds the forest also nurtures humanity; it is these same sacred waters that carry our spirits through this deeply thirsty world and on into the dusty, wind blown chambers of the next.

Soon after pulling into a puddle filled parking lot of the prison, I ran into Stephen as he was getting out of his car and we started up the wet sidewalk toward the main gate. I could tell from his expression that he felt good despite the weather; he must be a morning person I thought while pulling a hood over my head.

While taking long strides toward the front gate he spoke first, with a sarcastic smile, "I hear that the lawyers grilled you pretty good. That's what you get for going into special education. I think that's why the government has special ed, just for a place to dump their problems and the lawyers get to sue school districts. Like you said, not all kids can grow up in a classroom. Man, I wish they would try questioning me. I'd be grilling them back." He was talking quickly while looking down at his feet, making sure to miss any large pools of water on the concrete.

"Ya, sure. I wasn't about to start a fight with them. The school district has enough problems without me pissing off those lawyers."

"What's this I heard about some independent evaluation for Collins? Man, don't they know he's killed a young couple and will spend the rest of his life in jail? The guy is pure predator."

"Special ed laws say that they can ask for an independent evaluation whenever they want. I heard it will cost the district about thirty thousand dollars, plus their legal fees. Obviously there is no money. I think the school board is so tired of these lawyers harassing and running up the bills anyway that they can, that they want to close down the school

by next year.” After speaking I threw the hood off so to talk more easily.

”But what about the kids? Where will they go?”

”Back to some juvenile detention center. They can still earn a high school diploma there. But don’t tell them; it’ll just stir them up.”

Stephen slowed suddenly turning to look at me, saying, “But those are the places that have sent us their dangerous kids because we have more security.” He paused for a moment to think and then went on looking down again, “Man, we just started this thing and now they are already talking about shutting it down? Can the state help out? They were the ones that got the school district in here to begin with.”

”Tell me how the state will get these vulture lawyers off the back of the school district. You know that’ll never happen.”

”It’s sad to see adults fight like spoiled brats, with the kids in the middle, being the ones who really suffer. You know it’s only the money the lawyers are after, and the state only cares about the politics.

Finally reaching the front gate I grabbed the cyclone fencing, waiting for it to snap open once we had been identified by the tower officer.

Looking up there appeared a row of large crows squatting together on top of the gate fencing, some of which were looking back down on us. I said,

”They sure give a healthy look to the place.” Then I went on talking about the school, “Most of the kids really want the program. I’ve been asking a lot of them about it. They say we do a pretty good job of individualizing the education and talking to them about concerns they

have.” The gate clicked open and we walked through and started down another long sidewalk, this time under roofing, to the front door of the main office building for the prison.

After a little pause I went on, “You know what one kid told me when I asked him what teachers could do to help them get a new start on life?” I turned to look at Stephen to make sure he wanted to listen.

”What?” He said, without looking at me.

”That we needed to say that we believe in them. The student said that most of these kids have no sense of hope and we needed to do what we could to give them hope.” I paused to see if he would respond and then I said, ”I thought that was a pretty good observation for a kid. I can see what he is talking about.”

Stephen jumped ahead of me and grabbed the front door to the main building and held it open for me. Once inside we both stamped our feet and shook our coats to shake off the rain. The warmth of the building’s interior brushed up against our cold cheeks and felt good. An attractive brunette in uniform greeted us and checked our bags before we were able to enter deeper into the institution. Still being early in the morning no other people were seen.

”Hope must be a precious commodity in a place like this.” After a couple of minutes he responded forlornly, while we were walking farther down a hallway.

I replied, “Makes you wonder how someone sitting in a prison cell can

even find hope. It makes the education we're offering look like a pretty precious experience."

Stephen said, "Too bad the lawyers don't see that. They just what to know if we're crossing our T's and dotting our I's."

We walked toward and I reached up to grab the handle on the next locked door and waited to have a guard open it remotely. Suddenly a loud click gave out, the door jumped and I swung it open. After stepping onto another breezeway, we looked into the rain pouring steadily into the grassy courtyard surrounded by offices and inmate housing units, where we could see several crows flocking, feeding on crumbs on the ground; we both could feel the oppression of incarceration, it was physically present there in the rain.

"So what are you going to do if they close this place down?" asked Marge, sitting behind her desk drinking coffee.

"Probably go back to Seattle to live with my wife."

"You two will have to get use to living together again. You've been separate for a year." She said.

"I know. I'm so use to having time to myself and living without all the distractions."

"What about your dogs?"

"We have a sunken driveway that I turned into a dog kennel. They'll be ok there." I thought for a second and then said, "The bad part is that we

won't be able to go hiking everyday after school. I'll have to take them out one at a time on a leash."

"I don't see anything wrong with that."

I thought of all the reasons why that would hurt me, but felt that she would not understand. She had not been living with the dogs everyday for the past year and seen how they were enjoying their lives. All I could say was, "My dogs really enjoy being able to run free for awhile each day."

"My dog stays inside the house most of the day, but I take her for a walk in the morning. I don't think she would know what to do with herself without a leash on." She chuckled and said, "She'd probably chase around and get run over by a car."

"I figure I could still take them out every Saturday and do about a two hour hike. It'd be better than nothing. Those dogs love the woods as much as I do, so we're pretty much wanting the same thing."

"Well, you've got that wolf-dog. Aren't you afraid of him getting loose?"

"Hunting is central to his life. I know that. But I know him well and I'm not worried."

"Boy, why do you have a dangerous dog like that? Aren't they a menace to society?"

I had to pause for a minute; I never thought she would say such a thing to me. I loved my dogs dearly and they were like my own children.

Finally I replied, "I can tell there is a lot of the wolf in him; and I work at keeping him away from people in general because of that. But

there is a beauty in that wild nature of his. I think he does a better job of belonging to his world of the forest more than we could ever do belonging to our world of society.”

”Well, I just like to sit around with Bobby and watch TV.”

”I do that with Orion and Suka too. We usually split a bag of popcorn while I’m watching a video.”

”Well, in a few months you’ll be doing that with your wife, right?”

”Ya, I guess so. You know, I just thought of it. Dogs bring a lot less emotional baggage to their relationships than women. Maybe that’s why I like them.”

Describe a fight scene

I was helping a student in my fifth period class to write sentences using comma’s when I heard a someone yelling, “fight, fight,” down the hallway. Having been through similar situations a number of times during the past year, I just told the class to stay in their seats and continue on with their work. But I looked up and saw the two guards who routinely were seated in the corner of the hallway chase down the corridor and disappear behind a corner wall.

Doug Sequim was in the room during this time. Nearing his eighteenth birthday, he was about to leave the Youthful Offender Program and enter the adult population, an event he was not looking forward to. He still enjoyed getting up about in the middle of the class period and stand by a window to look out at any passing deer. For all the problems he had lived

through in his life, he still came across as a mellow, but moody youth.

His long, straight hair gave him a Native American look, but I wasn't sure what particular "race" he belonged to.

"Bet the fight was in the Library. Do you know how I know that?" He gave me a smile.

"No how?" I replied as I walked up of him.

"Cause there is a snitch working in there during this period and some guys have it out for him." He turned his back toward the wall and leaned against it.

"What guys are that?"

"Ha! What? You want me to snitch on them. You can find out for yourself. You'll be seeing them in your other classes. They'll be thrown in the hole by tomorrow." He continued with his smile.

"Did you know this was going to happen?" I started to probe.

"Sure, everyone knew that. Even the snitch knew that they were going to put hands on him. But I don't think he cared about it. The guys stupid."

"Do you think he was getting any favors from the guards?"

"He probably thought he was, but I doubt it." He paused for a minute and then went on, "When you have so many people living in a small space, you are bound to have fights. I think that is why road rages occurs, people are living too close together."

I said, "In prison I think most of the fights happen from gangs, or in the case of some of the strange kids, they just don't blend in well with

the rest.” I looked at the rest of the class and they were listening but didn’t seem interested in getting involved in the discussion.

Doug looked straight at me, “There are always going to be those bullies looking for a fight. But I think the better people understand themselves, the better they are able to get along with peers. You know, they are more self confident and not scared. I can see it in people.”

”I know this may sound crazy, but I can’t get it out of my mind. You know of Plato right? Well he was a Greek philosopher by back and he started many of our ideas on the importance of education. He thought that the most important thing a person could study and get to know was themselves. He saw a well educated person as one who thoroughly understood themselves. But I don’t think we are teaching kids much that will help them to better understand who they are. So a lot of kids grow up imitating rap stars and whoever else is a star in the youth culture, because they don’t feel like they have much of a life of their own. And when you look at it, they really don’t.”

Doug look at me seriously and gave a short chuckle, “You really don’t think much of school do ya. Then why did you become a teacher?”

”I want to help those kids who fall through the cracks in the system. It is so easy for someone to not be learning well in school, for whatever reason, get frustrated and then dropout. Once they have done that they can’t have much of a life besides living on the streets. And you have seen that, right?” Doug looked back at me and nodded.

”Well, someone from within the system needs to stand up ever now and then and say that education needs to be more than reading, writing , and arithmetic. There are a lot of kids out there who need to learn how to live, how to get their lives back together so they can get off the streets.” I paused and took a deep breath, “and I don’t think public education has the right to just forget about them.”

”I know special education get all the problem kids. It’s like the schools just dump them there not knowing what else to do with them.” said Doug.

”Ya, I think it’s an overly simplified approach toward a complex problem. It’s a lot of paperwork to prove that most special ed kids aren’t learning, and it probably helps to keep the lawyers away. A lot of kids lack strong families, so what they need is to be guided through challenges with a parent-like figure supporting them. That’s how kids learn how to grow up. Mentoring is good, but there aren’t enough of them to go around.”

”Yeh, my mom was too busy taking drugs to help me out. I still love her though. I have to. She’s my only mom.”

”It can be a pretty crazy living without good guidance. Especially for a kid whose not even sure about his family, much less the world.” I gave a sigh, turned to look out the window, hoping to find deer grazing in the nearby meadow. The only thing I could see was a man on a small tractor driving carefully over the bushes, for reasons I could not understand.

Chapter Break

It was about 3AM and I had just been awakened by the screams of an animal, somewhere outside. Lying curdled up in a thick layer of wool blankets I thought the sounds were coming from my neighbors house, that one of his dogs must of taken ill. Barking noises were coming at me from all around, from his dogs and my own. But it did not stop, a strange screaming, a wild crying out, like a shrieking sound, and it continued on while I laid there becoming agitated, not wanting to listening to it. There was no way I could simply fall back to sleep, I thought, rolling over, coming to the conclusion that I needed to crawl out of bed and try to stop the commotion. When stepping outside I was surprised to see that the night thoroughly illuminated by the disk of a full moon; the surrounding forest was bathed in a glowing ocean of bluish-silver light; distant trees normally invisible at night were clearly seen. The pale-yellowish orb hung close to the southern horizon, suspended behind the thick prickly growth of treetops. The forest appeared to be absorbing the ghostly light, much as a proselyte would soak in the dark brilliance of a ancient god.

While standing and looking out from the car porch the moon seemed to be drawn ever closer to the earth, pulled to it by the mysterious cries piercing through the forest. It was floating only on the coolness of night, clinging to the sky like a weightless reflection in a pool of standing water.

Again I heard the earsplitting screech that cried out from the woods near the cabin. I had thought that it was coming from the other direction,

from my neighbors house; that the cries might of been from one of his dogs becoming sick or injured. Now hearing it from the nearby woods I felt perplexed and alarmed. The dogs had become frantic, straining at their leashes, jumping up wildly wanting to hunt down the unknown prey; or perhaps it was to escape from it. They probably were not sure themselves what to do. But it was a moment where action was needed; the animal it was threatening us with wild, uncanny cries. Stepping a few feet out into the front yard I yelled, "Stop it!" I paused for a moment and then again, "Shut up!" Silence continued the next couple of minutes while I stood there waiting for its next outburst. But it did not happen. Slowly the dogs settled down and returned to their beds. Seeing their pointed ears poking up I knew they were not quite ready for sleep, nor was I.

The neighbors dogs has also quieted down, making for a peaceful appearing night. I stood there in the porch staring out into the bluish glare filtering through the forest, wondering what beast could have made such dreadful screams. The natural sounds of the woods slowly re-emerged in the croaking of numerous frogs, bathing in pools of waters alongside the roadway. I leaned against the side of the cabin, enjoying their tranquil sounds. It was such a massive chorus of gruff sounding frogs; I had rarely heard so many at one time; their throaty calls had a relaxing, almost therapeutic effect. The recent rains must of enlarged the pools of standing water beside the road, causing the frog population to multiply, I thought. Continuing to look out over the surreal landscape of the full

moon, I could feel that the night before me was not a typical one, that the moon and the forest had conspired together to make it different and strangely moving. Then suddenly, as though someone had waved an orchestral wand, the frogs stopped simultaneously. What a grand feat! How could they all have quit with not a split second difference? Did they of sensed a predator closing in? Dead silence now ruled the forest, not even a whisper of wind could be heard.

Eventually losing interest, I walked back into the cabin and returned to the comfort of my bed. The deep, thick blankets made for a snug nightly entombment, I thought, while brushing my hand across the pillow to shake off the cold it had collected while I was gone. Tomorrow I will have to ask the locals about the screeching animal, I thought while beginning to doze off. There was so much in the forest that can never be understand, no matter how hard one tries. So much there that reigns beyond our narrow lives, our fragile senses; but this is how it should be. Then I heard what may of been an owl outside, hooting far off in the distance. Straining my ears to again catch the sound, only a barely audible "who-what" was detected; I heard it once more and then I fell into a deep sleep.

As my old truck drove into the gravelly parking lot of the Sappho gas station, I quickly saw the numerous water filled potholes that I would have to step over to reach the front door. The clear night sky had

changed to where the morning sun was scarcely evident beneath a thick layer of clouds. Inside the building I could see a small cluster of ragged looking loggers standing, drinking coffee and conversing with one another.

”The log rolled over him just as he was done tightening them on the trailer.” I heard one say when I opened the squeaky door and walked into the old house that now was a gas station, looking for a morning snack.

”You know the same thing happened to me about fifteen years ago. I was loading a pile of Douglas fir on the back of my rig when a log slipped against a strap and caused one on top to roll off. It hit me in the back and knocked me clear across the road. Fortunately it didn’t crush me or I’d be dead too.”

”How are you doing?” I walked up to the cashier, an middle aged woman bundled up in a thick wool sweater and smoking a cigarette. “Is it going to rain all day?” I questioned.

”It rains just enough to scare away the tourists.” Standing up she replied with a long exhale of smoke.

”Can I get a sausage link there,” I said while pointing at one in the display case. Then I went on, “Say, let me ask you a question. Last night, out a my cabin, I heard some animal screeching real loud. It drove my dogs nuts. Then, when I walked outside and yelled, it stopped.”

The woman gave me a quizzical look, “You think it could of been an Elk?”

”I can’t imagine Elk making that kind of noise, and this was just one

animal, elk travel in herds.”

”You mean a high pitched kind of screech?” She handed me the sausage link in a small plastic bag and entered the amount in the till.

”Yeh, real high. Screech is the only word I know of to describe it.”

”Some people around here have heard of cougars giving out a wild scream. Don’t happen much though.” An elderly logger who overheard the talk responded.

Then one of his companions spoke, “I’ve heard people say that Bigfoot makes a screeching noise.” He turned to talk to his buddy, “You know Gary, up on Poverty Lane, on Burnt Mountain. He says that he heard something like that one night. Then the next morning he went out to look around and found some large, strange kinds of footprints.”

A third logger broke in saying, “Hell, I know that guy and I’d trust him like I would a wounded bobcat.”

I went on speaking, “Whatever it was it seemed to enjoy stirring up the dogs out there. Mine and the neighbors dogs got all bend out of shape over it. I don’t think I’ve seem them that excited for a long time.”

The woman gave me a thoughtful look and said, “I know one thing for sure and that’s on clear night with a full moon, animals run around like crazy.

I think that with the way they see things, you know with no colors at all, they think the full moon is really the sun, and that the night is still daytime. It fools them.” She sat back down behind the counter.

The first logger looked at her and said, “Isn’t that what they mean by

being bewitched?”

She replied with a smile, “Harry, you’ve been watching too much TV. You don’t know what he are talking about.” Then she went on, trying to finish her answer to my question, “But you know? I don’t think it stirs up or confuses all the animals, just the nutty ones. The ones that ain’t got much sense to begin with.”

”You mean it just effects the lunatics among them.” I said with a smirk.

Beginning to feel that my seriously minded question had become a joke, I returned to the truck and began the remainder of my damp drive to work. I no longer cared what animal it was screaming; I will never know. But the memories of that strangely light night will burn in my mind forever. I felt that I had seen the night turn into day, and nature responded in its’ own way. Strange as the woman’s words were, I thought about the power that the sun and moon had over life on earth, especially in the natural world. Maybe there was something to what she said, plus, for many humans I can see them having difficulty deciding which route to follow in life: either the warm authority of the sun or the cold powers of the moon. During the day we give of ourselves to the world like the sun does, unquestioningly; and then at night we become moonstruck and take in all of its’ intoxicating spirits, to recharge our drained batteries. This was the natural order of things. But the lunatics in the world have it backwards, they selfishly decided to take as much as possible during the day and then at night to give of themselves senselessly to the darkness,

further misleading themselves.

Settling into the drive through an endless series of puddles and falling rain, I began wiggling with the window wipers to get their interval correct. Realizing there will never be a perfect setting for such minor things I continued to ponder the wild screams in the night; perhaps it was Bigfoot or maybe a passing cougar. But most importantly there was such a strange beauty glowing in the darkened landscape. From the nights celestial luminescence I could see both the demonic and the angelic forces working to worm their way into the hearts and souls of all creatures. We seemed to live tragic drama where it was a constant struggle to conquer the eternal darkness with our personal sense of light, whether it be good or bad, right or wrong. But looking at the prison school in which I taught a strong feeling of hopefulness overcame me, that we will never bear false witness or present a misguided authority to our youth; that hopefully, we will never raise our children on anything but the nurturing powers of the sun.

Chapter Break

It was a couple of weeks later, toward the beginning of June, just prior to a routine Wednesday noontime staff meeting, that I met Stephen in the hallway, when he looked at me and said, “Someone told me that you heard Bigfoot screaming out in the woods. Is that true?”

I stopped in the hallway, shook my head and replied, “Stephen, I have no idea what it was; some local guy said that Bigfoot is suppose to make a

screaming noise. Whatever it was it was screaming like crazy.”

He looked at me seriously and said, “So, do you believe in Bigfoot? I mean you have been wandering around in the woods for almost a year now.

What do you think?”

I paused for a moment, feeling that he was asking a serious question and

I wanted to give him a honest response. I said, “I really don’t have a

definite opinion on it. But I tend to lean toward an answer that most

people have not even thought about. Instead of Bigfoot being a physical

creature inhabiting the forest, why couldn’t it be a spirit creature. I

mean the Indians saw everything as being a spirit creature of some kind.

And when you read their accounts of the animal it sounds like they are

talking about a spirit demon that lives out in the woods.”

”You mean something like a forest ghost that people might encounter.”

I replied, “Yeh, right. Like some people might see ghosts when they walk

into a haunted house. These things haunts the woods.”

”So you think it was a Bigfoot you heard the other night out at your cabin?”

”No. It probably was a cougar. I saw the dogs chasing one about a week

before, so the thing probably came back when it knew they were tied up and

started to scream just to irritate the hell out them.”

The principal, Frank LaPush, walked up to us speaking, “You guys about

ready for the meetings?” He then continued to walk into the classroom

where the other teachers had already sat down, some were eating their sack

lunches, and he sat down at the head of the arrangement of tables.

I and Stephen went directly to the rear of the classroom where the only vacant chairs could be found. I grabbed and carried it to an empty spot at the table next to where Marge sat. She carefully moved a small plastic sack of carrots to make room me.

”We have some important items on the agenda today so I don’t want to waste any time in getting started here.” Frank seemed to speak with more gravity of tone than I was used to hearing in his voice. So I opened up a notebook and prepared myself to thoroughly use it.

”I would like to start by saying that (Columbia Legal) has asked the school district for all information in our files related to a inmate we had last fall in school by the name of Morris French. They are claiming that we denied him his rights to earn his high school diploma. At this point I’m not sure what they exactly mean by that, but we will have to comply with their request and ship out records to their offices in Seattle.”

(Teacher) “But we only had Morris in class for a couple of weeks. He turned eighteen last November.”

Marge turned and whispered to me, “My god, this is a kid who shot a bus driver in the face and they are complaining that he didn’t get his right to a high school education? What could they be thinking of?” She shook her head and leaned back in her chair.

Frank continued, “To be honest with you I think this is just more of

their harassment. They don't care about the kids, they just want the school district to give them money so they will leave us alone." He suddenly fell silent and looked like he was about to bite his lip. But instead he went on to say, "I regret to have to say this, but the school district has told me this morning that they have decided not to continue with this school next year." He paused and a general commotion of noise came from the staff gathered at the tables. He went on, "They told me this: Cape Flattery is a small school district with very little for resources and the lawsuits have taken up a lot of their time and money. Quite frankly, having to deal with the lawyers so much they are now drained of their money. And with more legal actions on the horizon, they don't know where they are going to get the money to deal with it all." He paused for a moment and then went on, "When Bob talked to me on the phone this morning he sounded drained, worried, and a bit frightened about the situation they have now facing the district. They never thought when they took this program over last summer that it would turn out this way. The prison was in their district boundaries so they picked up the program, hoping to help some of these kids out. Unfortunately, it is not the kids that is the problem, but rather the lawyers who are constantly trying to make money off of them." A look of anger crossed his face.

"DOC deal with lawsuits all the time, why don't they help the district out?"

"Bob told me that DOC will probably be happy about having to move the

program. It looks like the kids will get shipped to a juvenile detention center. A lot of people believe that is where they belong any ways.”

”We have all seen the number of kids sent to us from detention centers. We have been getting kids that they cannot handle. You know that. This is a real prison. These guards know how to handle violent offenders. This place has been built for people like that. The juvenile places still treats them like kids and the violent ones take advantage of it.”

”Yeh, I guess they are going to have to adjust the way they do business when they start getting these kids back.”

”I’m just disgusted that no one helped us get a better start with this program. We were left all alone out here to sink or swim. ESD, who deal with the detention centers must of known that Columbia Legal would be on our backs. They could of prepared us for them, but nothing was were said. And you talked to that guy from Olympia who was the principal of Green Hill; he knew about Columbia Legal and had problems with them, but again no one ever tried to warn us about them.”

”Unfortunately, it will be the kids who suffer the most here. I think we had a really good program, in my opinion a program that was incredibly individualized in its’ approach toward education, but still stuck to the basics of the regular school curriculum. Our teachers were always ready to talk about whatever subjects the kids were concerned with, willing to do some mentoring while also teaching their subject areas. You don’t find that happening much in schools now days. Probably because class sizes are

too large.”

”What should we tell the kids?”

”Nothing right now. I’m afraid that when they find out they will stop caring about the school and give up learning.”

”I hate to say this but since the law suit was focused on special education so much, I keep thinking that the special education staff here has let us down and should take some of the blame.” Looking straight at me.

”Now that’s not true. The district has been waiting since the beginning of the program for the state to tell us how the special education laws should be applied to this environment. Unfortunately the lawyers saw an opportunity there, that we had failed to follow the laws regarding special education and suited before we got the state’s clarification.”

”I don’t see what is so dam difficult about someone having to do their job. The rest of the teachers here knew what they were hired to do and they did their jobs.”

”All I can say is what I’ve said before. This was and is a unique environment. The special education laws were never written for kids who have been thrown in the hole, or segregation as its called. We did what we thought was right but while waiting for the State to give us guidance on this issue Columbia legal sued us. Let me remind you that the suit is still before the courts and a number of people really think that we will win. But unfortunately for us, that is little consolation considering we

have lost our jobs.”

”I can’t help thinking that the people who should of known better how to run the school didn’t do a good job.”

”You need to remember that when we started the school last year, we knew that the lawyers were watching us carefully. I just think that we didn’t expect them to be as ruthless as they have been. Call it being naïve if you want.”

Marge said, “My god, I never thought it would end up like this. I really felt a sense of mission here at this school. I’ve never felt that way before. I mean these are kids that have really be thrown away by the rest of society. The juvenile system has deemed them too violent and risky to stay there, so they’ve been sent to the adult court. Like there was no where else left for them. They knew that the adults would only prey on and punish these kids, but that was all right because of their past crimes. Working as teachers, we were the only ones still left that could offer them some kind of hope. For me that carried some weight.”

”I don’t know about a feeling of mission, but I learned a lot about how education should operate if you want it to promote the growth and well being of a youth. More than ever I’ve become convinced that it all centers of the power of building relationships. People grow through the connections they make in life. There is no way around it. A person can always know more things and learn how to talk a fancier language, but to really grow you have to do it through connecting. Unfortunately, you can

really see that in these kids. That is their big weakness. And I think our strength here in working with them has been our willingness to make those connections with them. It has been something we've modeled for them."

"When we took over here we were told to experiment, try what you can; we saw ourselves trying something few other teachers had tried. Conventional teaching techniques were probably not going to work here. We soon learned that the best approach was to individualize. Like all these kids were special ed kids. It is so sad to think that no matter how hard we tried, the lawyers were determined to find fault with us and try to get their money."

"I don't think it is all that different even in regular schools. Special education is an easy target for lawyers because of all the laws it has. I think a lot of schools are always in litigation with at least one parent or two."

"Despite the shut down, I'm not leaving here with a sense of failure. Even though the lawyer wants to run everything, I know that I gave those kids my best, and I'll sleep good at night."

On the way back to the cabin after school that day, while driving on the highway past the ridge of mountains, I could see bald spots of where the logging had clear-cutted. They were located close to the cabin and they

looked horrid. What once was a pristine looking mountainside now had holes of nothingness in it. I felt that a young virgin had been violated just so her rich uncle could gain more money. The as I drove closer to the turn-off for the cabin I saw a Chinook helicopter hovering over one of the bald spots.

Just as I had driven into the driveway and was getting out of the truck the helicopter flew directly overhead. Looking up I could see that a long cable was dangling down from it and at the end of the cable was a couple of logs. Still watching the helicopter, it went toward the highway and then stopped, hovering but slowly lowering itself straight downward, presumably to unload the logs at a certain spot on the ground. Then later logging trucks will transport them to a company stockyard.

The noise was deafening and I worried about my dogs who had to put up with it all day, and how many days this would go on was uncertain. To think that I came out here for the peace and quiet.

Seeing the helicopter rise back up, now with only a cable and no logs, it flew back up to the large bald spot on the mountainside to pick up another load of logs. It was so close that I could make out the two pilots controlling it. If I wanted to I probably could of thrown a rock and hit one of them. I imagined what a job that must be for the pilot, simply flying back and forward, up and down, from one spot to another, all day long.

When I got inside the cabin the chopper noise was still deafening. It

made me angry and frustrated to be forced to live with such a malevolent nuisance. There was no way I could stay comfortably inside my cabin with that twin bladed tin can flying overhead.

After changing into my sweat clothes and unleashing the dogs, I walked over to my neighbors house. Walking up the driveway I saw that his garbage doors were over open on closer inspection I saw him standing inside working on the bed of a truck.

Seeing me walking toward him he stopped and met me at the rear of the truck.

"Come over to borrow some aspirins?" He chuckled and wiped his oily hands on a rag.

"Better get use to it. They are going to be around for a few weeks. That mountainside is full of logs and the chopper is the only way to bring down."

"Dam thing is so close it's rattling the glasses in my cupboard. This is National Forest. I didn't think they could be out here logging?"

"You know how businesses work. They can find a loophole and get what they want. Politicians love to suck up to the people with big bucks."

Anger and frustration began to swell up inside of me. I came out here to escape from the pressures and dirt of the rat race and now it looked like it had followed me. Looking up I could see the chopper rising back straight up carrying another load of logs at the end of the cable. I saw a man squatting in the open side door looking down at it, watch the logs

swing in the open air; he must of been the eyes for the pilots so they knew precisely how the operation was going.

”The forest is what gives us life; it produces the air we need to breathe; how can people let it get used up get so a few people can make money?” I pause for awhile. “Remember the fishing industry? They worked the oceans dry. The big companies got rich while the little man had to move on and learn a new trade, or go fishing in Alaska. Clallam Bay and Sekiu never bounced back from that period. And look at Sappho. They use to have a lot people living there, but not anymore. Business can’t just take, take and take all the time.” The feeling of frustration really began to eat away at me. I felt like I was getting carried away and just rambling on and on. I took in a deep breath just to shut myself up. My neighbor gave me a look as though he understood.

”That’s just the way things are. The strong dominate the weak. Even animals do it.” He paused for a second and then went on, “They’ll be done here in a few weeks and then this place will go back to the way its’ been for the past umpteen hundreds of years. My wife wants to go on a week long vacation someplace its’ driving her so crazy. We has to put up with it all day. You get to leave for work.” He smiled at me, trying to cheer me up.

”I just don’t understand how people who have been educated so well, how can they be so ruthless in the way they exploit the things around them. What kind of an education is that? They must all be thinking that they

are living on a one-way street; their job is to take as much as they can and get out. Maybe it the way we educate people that makes them like that. We don't teach anything about the values of relationships. So people grow up thinking only about themselves."

"If there was one institution that could change society for the better, so our children could live in the best world possible, it is education."

"Teach children how to find value, find their sense of wealth in people, and not in material things. It shouldn't be so difficult to do that.

This could possibly be a way to cause the moral re-birth in our society."

I continued to feel frustrated by the lawyers who I knew would continue to harass the school district. I was frustrated by the idea of the school closing, frustrated by the idea of having to move back to city life, frustrated with my wife who is too materialistic and emotional, frustrated by the fact that schools have apparently given up on the idea of teaching citizenship skills; that society needs people who are concerned about the well fair of others; who are morally against the idea of permitting the needless death of others. Only this will prevent the decay of society.

I continued to go on my daily walks, the rain and cold winds continued well through the spring time. Occasionally the sun would come out and a short period of physical and emotional jubilation would begin. But soon the clouds and mist would return with the same bleakness of winter that I had been living with for months. Often during these walks through the

deep, dark woods, it was not any sense of loneliness that possessed me so much as a sense of remoteness. It was a feeling of detachment from the common affairs of society, like I had been swallowed by the wilderness. It the only solid reality I was able to recognized anymore. My whole being was nothing more than the wind, rain and forest.

It was during our noon lunch break, where I met Stephen eating his lunch alone in his classroom. I walked over to a barred window and looked out hoping to see more deer, but none were there. Summer was approaching and the landscape showed it. Tall green grasses were slowly covering the meadow and the sky had prominent patches of blue splashed in various areas. The clouds were a bulbous cotton white and the distant ocean had a soothing coolness to it.

”So how are your classes going? Any of the kids ask about the school closure?”

”None yet. But we are going to have to tell them soon.”

”I know. Some of them really want to graduate and will be disappointed.”

”I’d be really pissed if I were one of them. I’d feel like I was being jerked around on a chain.”

I was a situation in which I had little control. I was just doing what I had been told. What to change the topic I said, “Can I get some feedback from you about a dream I had the other night?”

”Sure, yeh.”

”It’s not just the dream that puzzles me but the metaphors that I keep thinking about that seem to relate well to it.”

”That sounds interesting, go on.”

”I suppose it was about two o’clock in the morning when it occurred; and I still am not sure if it was a dream or some kind of out of body experience. It stands out starkly from all the other dreams I’ve remembered having, and I have made it a priority in my life to remember my dreams in the morning and try to digest them, understand their emotional content within which holds their meaning. It was a simple and straightforward dream. In it I was crawling out from my body while also floating in mid air. Let me see if I can describe it better. It took place in my bedroom. That is the strange part of it. I felt that I was still in my bedroom, feeling and seeing the place exactly the way it really is. My body was in bed fast asleep. But my conscious form I guess you could call it, was struggling at the foot of the bed, rising up in the air and moving toward the ceiling in the middle of the room, away from my body. This form of consciousness was like a worm crawling out of an apple. I didn’t feel like I was still a part of my body anymore, but rather detached from it. And while I was practically suspended there in mid air, I remember struggle intensely to turn around so I could look back and see my sleeping body laying in bed. But I could not do it and then I woke up.”

”Well, this consciousness that I experienced was a kind that does not

rest when the body does so, obviously. It was a sort of dream consciousness. But the worm-like nature of my posture and movements keep haunting my memories of the dream. Like I said, it was like a worm crawling out of an apple. I keep thinking to myself that the human soul must resemble a similar sort of worm that can enter into and move through all things. Like a vision of will power itself, the soul is not bound by materialistic laws, that way it can transcend such matters and grant us a degree of true freedom.”

But mostly I think during that time in my life I had started to become very interested in dreams and what they could reveal about myself. And this worm-like form was trying equally as hard to turn around and to see myself. But of course the true self is very fleeting and no body can absolutely see and understand themselves, like an open book. That is why the worm was not able to turn around my form laying on the bed. The most we can hope for is to promote a general sense of growth and understanding.

Stephen went on to say, “Have you had anymore of those witch dreams.”

I said, “No, but I had have something similar involving my wife. I wasn’t lost but rather out in the woods standing in a place where a number of different trails came together and I felt confused about which one I should be taking to get back home. I had just started on one trail when I looked up seeing my wife on another one leading uphill and she was motioning to me to follow her. Just as I started to move in her direction

to catch up with her, she changes into an owl and flies off.”

Beowulf

Summer had arrived and it was obvious the kids knew. They were more restless, unmotivated, talkative and distractible than usual. Knowing that all of their back-home school buddies were spending the summer out of the school while they sat in prison must of been very irritating.

So I decided to tackle what I thought would be fun and rewarding work:

Beowulf. It was an assignment that I had been thinking about doing for a couple of months and finally decided that I was ready for it.

”Beowulf is the oldest of the great long poems written in English. It tells the story of the hero called Beowulf. So tell me, what is a hero. How would you define it.”

”The good guy in a Hollywood movie. He gets the girl.”

”Is that all you know about heroes.”

”They get a lot of money for making movies.”

”No, I mean,” I thought a little, “Give me some examples of real life heroes.”

There was silence and all seemed to be thinking it over. Suddenly _____ blurted out, “Bruce Lee was a hero. Nobody could beat him up!” Some kids laughed.

”OK, OK, let me talk. What about some firefighter who runs into a burning building to save a little kid. Isn’t that a hero?”

”Man I wouldn’t do that. Maybe for my mom, but that’s it.”

”Well, I think you all get the point about what heroes are. Let me tell the story.”

The kids seemed to enjoy hearing the story, of how Beowulf killed Grendel, then Grendel’s mother, becoming a king and then dying while fighting and killing the dragon. It seemed to resemble a Hollywood movie in many ways, one where the hero dies in the end.

”What do you think Beowulf was motivating Beowulf to risk his life and to fight these monsters?”

”He wanted the glory. And to get rich.”

”What does glory mean to you? What’s about it that attracts people?”

”You get famous, everyone looks up to you, you get a lot of respect from people.”

”So you think that by fighting the monsters and helping the people he was also thinking that he was earning favors from God? That ancient people had a very strong belief in God and it was that kind of belief that helped them to become extremely brave people?”

”You mean like a sacrifice. They were willing to sacrifice themselves. People now days want too much.”

I thought about the tree in the forest and seeing the face of Christ there. “But isn’t it important that people understand that to die bravely and doing it for others is a glorious way to affirm the value of life? If I die for you doesn’t that make your life more precious? Doesn’t it give

other people greater motivation to become courageous?" I paused for awhile.

"What is it people say? You never know what you have until you lose it?"

I looked at them carefully, analyzing their faces. "Do you understand?"

"I think I know. You're just saying that if I'm willing to sacrifice everything for you, then you must be a pretty important person. And if people start to feel that way then other people will start to think that they should be more courageous in fighting for their lives and for the lives of other people."

Do you really think that sacrifice has lost its meaning? Isn't there something you would be willing to sacrifice for? What about all these people who have families and work long hours everyday just to be supporting their wife and kids. What kind of glory do you see in that?"

"It doesn't take much bravery to do that."

"I know. But it does take a willingness to sacrifice a lot of your personal interests. You can't just be hanging out with your buddies everyday."

"Just because you don't have any buddies. Man, what do you know living alone out in the woods."

"It is easy to become a selfish person, but there is no real glory in it.

People seem to understand that naturally. You know the old saying, "what goes around comes around."

Do you think Beowulf was feeling when he saw all of his men run into the

forest while he was fighting the dragon?”

”He was probably thinking, “Man I’m going to have to find myself some new homies.”

”You know what culture means, right? It is the beliefs that people have grown up to believe in, within a certain society. What do you think our culture should say about “courage”? Anything about what a courageous people would be like?”

”They would be fair, maybe wise.”

”What about loyalty. Beowulf was very loyal to his king. But remember in those days the job of the king was only to look after the welfare of his people. They didn’t have special interest groups like we do now days.” Pause. “Don’t you think this loyalty says something about his faith in his rulers and perhaps even God?” Pause. “Do you think we have much of that kind of faith now days?”

Silence in the room. Kids beginning to look gloomy, bored.

”But isn’t that a powerful way to define what it means to be human? To firmly believe in the importance of your own people; so much that you are willing to sacrifice everything for their welfare and the glory of doing so.” Pause. “What effect to you think that would have on other people? So you think that would help people to feel that they their lives would be more meaningful? Remember that Beowulf knew that if he died fighting the dragon, their enemies would invade his country. But did it any ways. Why?”

”Perhaps he felt it was better to die bravely fighting dragons than to live in fear of your mortal neighbors.” Pause. “What does this mean?”

”That he would rather die showing his people the importance of committing brave acts, to have glory, than to live in fear.”

”But I think there is also a symbolic level of looking at the story.

What if the monsters and even the dragon symbolized the demons that inhabit our inner lives? That these demons guarded an inner treasure, an inner form of wealth that all people crave, such as peace and love.”

”What would it mean to struggle with them and to be able to kill them? Isn’t that a kind of inner liberation? And if one man could do it would that inspire other people to do it also?”

Wife phone call

”I should be able to find a special ed job somewhere around the Seattle area for next year. But I’m getting tired of the intense paper work.

It’s always the paperwork that attracts so much attention; I could be teaching them how to build wigwams and no one would care.”

”Don’t worry about having to help out a lot with your mom and dad. I know you’ll be tired coming home from work, and you’ll have schoolwork to do also.”

”I’ll do what I can. This whole past year has been draining for me. But I think it has taught me a lot. I love living out in the country.”

”Yeh, maybe in a year or two we can buy a house with five acres of land

in the countryside.”

”Someplace close to the mountains, so I can go hiking after work with the dogs.” I paused. “The thing I dread most is how busy the city gets. Humans are so compartmentalized there and life is so controlled and programmed. You never really feel alone. It’s a difficult place to learn how to dig deeply into your own soul and see your own uniqueness. I guess I’ll just buy a good tent and go camping a lot.”

”Yeh and you can go alone with your dogs.”

“I really think that the one thing I enjoyed most about cabin life was the sound of the rain on the bedroom roof. What a beautiful sound to lull you to sleep.” I went on, “You know watching those dogs when I went walking in the woods. They would chase around through the bushes and trees snuffing and looking for prey all the time. Man they just loved it out there. I reminded me of the way women would go shopping in a mall. They would have to stop and check everything out, making sure to not miss anything.” I paused, “Maybe that’s where human got their desire for shopping, for ancient hunting instincts that have been long repressed.”

”Very funny. Then why don’t you go hunting?”

”I think I’m more of a spiritual hunter. I hunt by studying things like nature and dreams, to see what kinds of mystic messages may be out there.”

”I know. You’ve gone nuts while living out there in the woods. That’s what my friends think. Every time you come home you’re wearing a different sweatshirt with an animal picture on it.”

”That’s only because I get them cheap from the thrift stores. What? You want me to walk around with a big NIKE sign on my forehead?”

”I just worried about you out there all alone. Some people don’t do well living out in the middle of nowhere.”

”You don’t like animals do you. Just admit it. You never did like the dogs. They were something you couldn’t easily control and dominate. Boy wait until I tell Orion about this. He’s not going to be happy with you.”

”Very funny. You can tell your wolf-dog to stay out of the house. I still don’t feel very safe with him around. He has a weird way of looking at me.”

”That’s because you’re afraid he knows what you’re thinking. Wolves can read peoples minds.”

”Are you going to be serious or not.”

”OK. Just don’t tell me that nutty people live alone. I’ve learned a lot just by spending this time out in the woods. You should try it some day, you might learn something too.”

”You know what Greg said? He couldn’t understand how you could live out there without a cell phone. What if something happened to you?”

”That’s paranoid thinking, you can’t live your life being afraid.. You can fall in the bathtub and not be able to call for help.” I paused for awhile and then went on, “In nature everything seems to get born, lives a little while, and then dies. And it goes on and on like that, forever.

You can't fight the system. The best thing is to use your time alive as wisely as possible. Learn to see death not as an ending but rather as a new beginning. See it all as positive." Pause. "Talking about death, I recently made a decision about the way I want to be buried. I told you before I want to be cremated because I hate the idea of being locked inside a small box for the rest of eternity, right?"

"Yes."

"Well you know nobody will take care of Orion if and when I die because he's a wolf hybrid. Even a wildlife sanctuary place told me they would put him to sleep rather than try to care for him or adopt him out. So when I go he goes to. So I want him to be cremated and tossed into the Sol Duc river at the same time I am. We can both be set free at the same time. And I want to put that in writing in my will."

"OK, OK, I understand. You call the lawyer when you get home. Let me change the subject. You're painting the fence this summer right?"

"What? You never said anything about doing that. It'll take weeks."

"That's OK. Just make sure you do a good job. The neighbors will be watching."

"But I wanted some time to go camping."

"I know a good spot in the yard for your tent. I'll even cook the hot dogs."

"Boy sometimes you can be a real witch."

"Thanks."

Finally the day for graduation arrived. It was the eighth of June and preparations for as much of a gala event to be celebrated in prison had been made. Fourteen caps and gowns were ordered and had been stored away, speakers was assigned, chairs and music were arranged, announcements were made and ready to be handed out, and members of the graduates families had hopefully sent in their paperwork so they could be cleared by the security staff at the prison and be allowed to come in. Many a staff member dreaded the idea of a student's family arriving for the graduation, having driven five or six hours, only to be turned away at the door because no documentation could be found approving their entrance.

Graduation was to be held in the visiting room which was large enough to hold a small convention. The carpeting was a police blue and on the light blue walls were large acrylic paintings to natural landscapes done by prisoners. They helped to give a comfortable, easy going appearance the otherwise sterile surroundings. Tables were placed near the vending machines with cake and punch ready to serve after the formal ceremonies were finished.

"How many people are coming for Rajas?" I asked Stephen as we walked together to the visiting room. We wanted to show up early anxiously anticipating the arrival of the guests. It would be fun to see the families of the kids we had worked so long and hard for, trying desperately to assist them in getting the credits they needed for the

diploma.

”He told me yesterday that his mother, both grandparents, his two brothers and a sister. That’s six, right?”

”That’s a long way to drive from Spokane with six people in the car.”

”He is so proud. He is the first person in his family to graduate from high school.”

”That is so cool to hear. What? He has about twenty years in prison, and he is only eighteen. At least this gives him something to feel good about. I’ve always liked the kid.”

”Yeh. He’s easy to get along with.”

”Who’s the student speaker? I haven’t heard yet.” Having to spent most of my time with the segregation inmates I usually missed much of the daily news.

”Carson will do it. I talked to him in my class and he agreed to do it.”

”Isn’t involved with a prison gang?”

”Yeh, but he is so glad to be graduating and his mother is going to be there. He’s not going to say anything stupid with her around. You should see him. He’s all excited about it.”

The first speaker was the principal, Frank La Push. He gave the standard welcome greeting, talking about his pride in the students, how hard they worked for their diplomas, becoming successful in spite of living in the harsh and distracting prison environment. That the self-determination, self-discipline and all the academic skills they

learned will help them in becoming more successful when they get back in regular society. And then came the bombshell announcement. I could see it coming in the way his face became gravely serious. Frank cleared his throat and said, “Unfortunately Cape Flattery School District has made a decision not to sponsor the school for next year. That means that the students will have to be send to a juvenile detention center in order to continue with their high school education. We regret this decision, but because of the pressure exerted by lawyers who want to sue over technicalities that are beyond our control and the districts limited financial resources, I can see why they would want to bow out of this situation. What is most frustrating is the fact that for all the scrutiny that the lawyers have put us through, never once did any of them take to time to walk through our high school to see for themselves what kind of job we are doing.” Looking grim he went on, “I want also to thank our teachers who have done a marvelous good in the face of some very different circumstances. Eagle Crest High School was a grand experiment in education. No one ever thought about teaching kids sentenced to a state penitentiary before, and only a few states in the country are doing it. You have to be there to understand it. We were all hoping not to just education but to rehabilitate.” Looking at the rows of graduates sitting in their chairs he concluded, “So hopefully you will remember as you continue on with your lives, that at least for awhile, we were there with you to help you learn how to aim high. Thank you.”

The Assistant Superintendent Joyce Cooper spoke next. She spoke about being sad for the closure of the school, about the problems dealing with the constant stream of law suits that go through the Department of Corrections, extra burden this change in schools will place on the state detention centers. She also praised the teachers for the way they dealt with some of the most difficult kids imaginable.

Then came the student speaker. Carson was a tall thin youth with shoulder length, straight black hair. He had a few pimples on his face and the early stages of a mustache. His voice was uncertain of itself but he stood firm behind the podium, determined to get through his speech as effectively as possible. “When I first came to Clallam Bay I felt like there was no hope for me. This was the end of the line. This was where the adult spend much of their lives; they called it home, they called it Gladiator’s School. And it is a difficult place to live much less to learn how to grow up, especially for a teenager. But when I started to go to school I learned that these teachers were more concerned about me than whether I knew the alphabet or how to multiply. They care about the kind of future I was building for myself. They talked about life problems just as much as they did about English and math problems. They would sit down with a student and take time to get to know them. Soon I started to feel more confident in who I was and what I could be.” He paused for a moment. “So I became determined to get my high school diploma to show my family that I could be successful. And now that I’ve done that I want to thank

everyone who has helped me. Thank you.”

Then came the handing out of diplomas, where each student’s name was called out and the audience applauded for them as they walked up to shake hands with the principal, get their diploma and have their picture taken. I could feel the delight in the audience. Some would whistle seeing their loved one in cap and gown being handed such a certificate reflecting certain social esteem.

”We have fourteen graduates here and only four families showed up. That really shows you the parent involvement these kids had while growing up I think.”

”These kids have burned a lot of bridges.”

“I know they were hell to try to handle while back home, but now they’ve done something positive. You’d think the parents would want to be here and recognize the good that the kid has done.

”I suppose a lot of them have parents who have records too, and that has prevented them from getting in through the front gate.”

Turning around I saw the father of Bruce, a student who seemed to of made a last minute turn around in his behavior and earned the credits needed to graduate.

”So what do you think changed Bruce and made him want to study.”

”This kid has been in trouble since middle school. And you know it seemed to me that he was downing farther downhill rather than uphill in his life.

A lot of these guys go to jail and it becomes an revolving door. They end

up spending most of their lives behind bars. So I say to Bruce, "If you ever want to hug your father again, you better get your act together and start making something out of yourself. I think he knew that I was about to completely give up on him, you know, just throw him out of my life. But he started to study and got his diploma. I think this will be one of the happiest days in my life."

I knew Bruce, he was one of my kids who had spent time in the hole. There was a definite change about him. Gone was the hate, the feeling of frustration, and the gloomy despair that fills so many of the kids in prison. There was an unmistakable sparkle of pride in his eyes. He now knew that his father would never again want to give up on him; after all the years of contention he had earned his dad's respect and pride. He still had a few years to do in prison but they were not to be years of darkness and self denigration.

It did not take long for me and some of the other school staff to feel all talked out. After about a half hour I said my good-byes to Frank and Stephen and some of the other teachers. I decided to take the last few days of school off to spent the time at home with my wife back in Seattle. It was sad to think that I may never see them again, especially after having gone through an intense year together at school.

I followed Marge out the front door heading to the parking lot. Even with her fast pace I decided to try to get in a little conversation. I said, "Well, maybe it's for the best that the school is closing. The kids can

just stay in the juvenile system.”

”Generally we have the monsters of the juvenile system. When they get back together with the other teenagers they will probably prey on the weaker ones and make their lives even more miserable. At least here there are the adults around to keep them in check.”

”You mean the adults can prey on them rather than they prey on the weaker kids.”

”Whatever.” Her paced did not slow down any and it appeared that she was not really into the conversation. I began to think about the basic concept of predator and prey. The kids talked in those terms a lot in prison, and I saw it happening in the woods, too. I began to wonder if there was any world in God’s domain that did not have predators or prey; where the strong did not feed off the weak and the weak did not overly depend on the strong.

I was barely able to say goodbye before she turned away from me and headed for her car.

When I returned to the cabin that afternoon I dreaded the idea of having to pack up and leave for home. It was such peaceful place to live. The only sounds heard was an occasional dog, a passing car in the distance, and the wind and rain. It was a place that knew how to soothe my troubled nerves. I felt that I was leaving a greatness of spirit that I had found in the wilderness; a wild companion spirit that was not available in the

city. Or was it? I would have to find out. Somehow I would still have to find a way to make those connections in order to stop myself from self-destructing.

I decided to stay one more night and leave the next morning for home. The June weather was turning beautifully into summer, and my hiking sweats had now become a T-shirt and shorts. Fortunately the nights were still cool enough to keep the bugs away.

I quickly released the dogs from their leashes and we headed for the river to go on our usual three mile hike. Orion jolted out ahead of me charging anxiously for the trail and Suka let distraction rule her route, stopping at numerous places to investigate and sniff. They both loved to examine the terrain that they were passing through thoroughly. Constantly in search of and checking out scents and scents trails, they reminded me of a pair of women in a shopping mall. Very little seemed to escape their scrutiny.

We followed the Sol Duc river on the abandoned highway like we had done a hundred times before, thinking of it as being like an old friend from which we must part. It's clear light blue waters were shallow not and if it were not for the force of the rushing waters one could walk across it.

At one point I was fearful that Orion would do so because the noise campers were making in a state park across the river were distracting him.

A couple whiffs of cooking hot dogs would surely entice to do so, I

thought. When we got to the Synder Work Center we turned around and I could not resist standing there for a moment looking up at the ridge of mountains hovering above. Only a few bellowing white clouds were seen and the green thickly wooded hillsides seemed to soaking the richness of sunlight and air. It was a picture of primeval freedom that I will never forget. Those were the mountains that contained the hiking trails that took me from the conflicts of civilization and helped me to return to a state of Eden. I always felt so alive and in tuned in those woods.

Nobody can take that away from me. I can always find new woods for hiking; I just can not be going out everyday like I had been.

When I returned I saw my neighbor in his garage. I nearly felt like avoiding him because I felt depressed about leaving and did not want him to see me so out of sorts. But he seemed like a sensitive man who knew how life can bring unexpected events. His dog came out barking not at me but my dogs who were following me.

"Come on now Max, stop that." He yelled to get the dog to stop.

"Beginning to feel a lot like summer," I said. The I went on, "They're closing the school down for next year, so I'm out of a job."

"You were saying something about that before. Too bad. You can just go back home though. Probably be good for you."

"Yeh. It'll take a little getting use to, but I'll find a teaching job somewhere for next year. They always need special ed teachers." Paused and then went on, "I got me a tent off the Internet and plan on doing some

camping over in the Northern Cascades. It'll give me a chance to drive around and do some exploring."

"Don't let those city people give you a hard time. I've heard they can get pretty nutty."

"I don't think I will ever get use to the traffic. Out here I had only one stop sign in the twenty five miles I drove to work. And no traffic to speak of."

"But are you going to miss that cabin? I know it got pretty cold in there last winter."

"Ya it did. You're probably right about that. But I enjoyed having a fire going in the stove. Something about living with fire, depending on it to keep you warm. It is like the wind and the rain, it gives you a good sense of what life is all about, I guess."

"You have been a good neighbor. I just hope we don't get more of those bikers out here renting the cabin. Those people get too noisy."

"I'll tell the landlord to look for a good wood-cutter. They tend to be mellow people. All they have to do is find wood to chop up and sale it in the city." I paused. "That's probably a pretty good way of life to think of it."

"It's good as long as you have a strong back. They can probably make about three to four hundred bucks a week. Not bad for being self-employed."

"I need to stop dreaming. I've got too many bills to pay. When I got my

medical retirement from the Army, I thought I would only live the simple, enjoyable life; but now I have to keep teaching just to pay for things. I love working with the kids and hope always to be doing so, but there is a lot of paranoia about lawyers that makes the job teaching stink. Lawyers and state politics run education and it should be the needs of the kids.”

I paused for a moment. “I really think it is a crime the amount of kids that drop out of school and nobody cares.”

”A lot of kids don’t have the parents to teach them how to be good in school.”

”Yeh, but that only makes school even more important. You can’t just give up on them easily and hope they go away.” Looking around and see the mountains. “I think I learned a lot in my year out here. The wilderness can teach a man a lot if he is willing to listen. It might sound strange but I keep thinking the best thing school can do for our kids is to teach them how to be strong and to have courage in their hearts, because that’s what they really need to live well.”

”I’m not sure if you can teach courage.”

”You can. I’m sure that you can teach anything you want. Just by focusing on something, discussing it and then doing some related exercises you teach it. If you think it is important the kids will also. For whatever reason, courage, especially moral courage, is not important in America and schools do not teach it.”

”Yeh, I guess we got it too easy now days. Unfortunately, America has a

soft underbelly and it doesn't take much to rub it the wrong way."

I laughed at his use of words. "It's called cynicism." I was going to miss talking with people who spend their lives living out in the woods.

They have such strong personal points of view.

"You take good care of that wolf-dog of yours. He's a beauty. Those city people might get up tight seeing him run around."

"I've got a good kennel back home just for that reason. He makes my wife and daughter nervous because he looks so much like a wolf, but my mother you know has Alzheimer's and she doesn't see anything but a dog, and they get along great. He jumps into her bed and she starts petting him like crazy. It's funny to watch."

"You know what they say, 'you take the animal out of the wild but you can not take the wild out of the animal.'"

"The only difference between Orion and an average dog is that he is that he seems to be more aware of things, more sensitive, and has more of a warrior heart. It's not that he's mean, it's just that he can handle conflict better than domestic dogs. He won't give up as easily." I was trying to simplify basic impressions that I only understood vaguely.

"Wolves sure got a bad reputation. Probably isn't deserved."

"Indians use to think that wild animals were the messengers of the gods.

We sure don't think like that anymore."

"We don't have to. We got TV."

On that note we parted.

Ferry

The water looked as smooth as velvet as I drove on to the ferry boat.

Traffic was thin due to it being close to noon, when most people were eating their lunch. The drive from the cabin had been relaxing and I was still feeling fresh from a night's sleep. Orion sat next to me since he would still get car sick in the back of the truck, and Suka seemed to enjoy having the space to herself. At least I did not feel alone driving the long highways, especially without a radio on.

I quickly pulled in behind a long line of cars, shut off the engine and walked upstairs for a bite to eat. After grabbing a chicken sandwich I decided to take it outside on a front deck to catch some sunlight and eat it there.

The ocean glistened with sunlight and a few sailboats could be spotted wrestling with the wind, making their way across the Pudget Sound. On the southern horizon majestically sat Mount Rainier. The large snow covered cone floated in the sky like a mirage, and it made me think of the comment my dad made about it being "God's country". In the distance and just east of the ferry a large container ship was slowly creeping northward, heading for the Straits of Juan de Fuca, and then across the Pacific Ocean. It probably just unloaded a king's ransom in tennis shoes and was returning to it's home port.

I was leaning against the railing staring down at the turbulent flow of

water created by the ferry, a favorite pastime on ferry boats, when I noticed a familiar face looking my way. After a moments thought I recognized it as being one of the kids that were friends with my daughter.

The pale, round faced youth with a tattoo on his right arm walked up to me with a smile.

”Hey Mr. Cole. How are you doing.”

”Pretty good on the day like this.”

”Are you on your summer break now?”

Wanting to avoid a nasty topic I said that I was.

”I’m going to college next fall. I’m not sure what I’ll take up there but it’s better than working forty hours a week.” He paused for a moment.

”I’ll probably tend bar part-time, just for spending money.”

For some reason I seemed to have a difficult time know what to say to the youth. I had talked to him a couple of times around the house, while he was visiting with Mary, but now I was tongue tied. I looked again out across the waters to see that Seattle was looming ever larger on the horizon and I felt lost, moving between two totally different worlds.

Below was a hundred feet of nothing but water and I suddenly could feel every inch of it.

”Have you checked out any of the vocational schools? You’re still young.

You can always get a degree also.”

”My parents just want me to go to college. They say I have to get a Bachelor’s degree. Heck, I’ll have fun there. You know, meet a lot of

new people.”

”It was that way in my family too. All us three boys went to college and we all got a Bachelor’s degree. Of course we didn’t know what to do with them but we did ok in life.” I laughed and went on, “Afterwards I joined the Army as a private just to get a sense of real life. Looking back I think it was good for me. Too much book learning can drive you crazy.”

”I dream about hitch-hiking around Europe, but I don’t think my parents will let me. But it would be cool.”

”Don’t worry about trying to find life, it will find you. Just wait and it’ll bite you in the ass.” We both laughed. “Just don’t build any brick walls; those are the things that get people in trouble. Keep an open mind.”

After our talk I returned down the stairs to my truck where Orion was still sitting up in the front seat, watching a small group of people walk pass. I sled into the drivers seat and leaned it back to close my eyes for a short rest. We should be landing in Seattle in just a few minutes, I thought. I’m going to hate driving through that traffic. There is a stop light on every corner and I get distracted by all the clutter on city streets. But I still have two months to find a new job and plenty of time to explore the Cascades. I’ll have to leash on the dogs and go jogging with them on alternative days, just to keep them and myself in good shape.

I rolled a little to one side hoping to snooze just a little. Orion curled up and laid down in his bucket seat. I could hear a seagull crying

from somewhere beside the ship. It was probably hoping for food to be throw out by a passenger. I thought about the birds that follow the highways in search of road kill, and then of Orion running up and down the small winter stream hunting for returning salmon. I too was returning home, to be with my wife and family. To hopefully find the rich treasure trove of life's bounty.
