**Showcasing the DNR: The ‘Wishing Place’**

*“I’ll not forget that day, when Mother Nature cried on Redwood Hill,”* – Gordon Lightfoot

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As I stood at the base of the mammoth and ancient rocks, I instantly recalled the way up, the way to the top.

There were the smoothed black-red rocks, warmed by the morning sun, that felt good beneath my feet. Their surfaces were covered partially, sprinkled with rust-colored white pine needles.

Then there was that little jog to the left and then back to the right as I slipped my toes in between a jagged crack in the rocks to gain a foothold. Gnarled roots lying over the rock faces gave me a way to get a hand up.

Yes, I remembered the way up.

What I guess I had forgotten was the majesty of the place once I reached the summit.

Up here, the surface of the rocks is covered with more pine needles and spectacularly intricate mosses and lichens, displaying a gorgeous array of shades and hues.

There was everything from bright new-grass green and powdery pinks to mushroom browns and grays. The air was clean and fresh.

Seeing the view as I crested the rocky ridge, my heart floated and my head felt light too – as though I was being possessed by a spirit, or more accurately, repossessed by something so much greater than me.

This was the spot I’ve called “The Wishing Place.”

At one time, I would travel here almost daily to feel the wind, look out across the blues and greens of the shimmering lake and the rugged shore, with the sky clear above me for as far as I could see.

I would think here, reason, reflect and dream.

But somehow, I kind of lost my way back here over the past several months.

I think I got bogged down in the darkness, like an Eskimo living in the land of the midnight sun.

Somewhere on the inside, wishing became something I didn’t really feel comfortable doing. It seemed like something childish and fruitless. I realize this in retrospect: it wasn’t something I was aware of then.

But as the weeks and months passed, I began to feel something else deep inside me, something troubling. I was becoming numb.

Even within the grand forest cathedral halls of nature, I found myself struggling to connect the way I was used to. I lost some connection. It wasn’t electric like it had been, alive to every surrounding stimulus.

Frankly, I didn’t realize how much I’d lost or left behind me until I climbed up here this morning. That rush that hit me when I saw the view was like being overcome by a kind of powerful fragrance.

I felt my legs weaken and wondered if I might fall to my knees.

I sit here now realizing how much I must have been missing, no longer communing regularly with nature from my special place here among the rocky crags, where I can see and hear the loons on the lake.

I feel as though everything here is alive and speaking to me. The trees no doubt remember me. The white pines shelter me with their soft branches, just a couple feet above my head, even as I’m sitting down here along the ledge.

Sounds travel so clearly over the water. The putt-putt-putt sound of a fishing boat reaches me from across the open bay about the same time as the voices of the its anglers.

I find it inspiring that while so much has changed with the world, so much here seems to be just as fine, just as welcoming, just as redeeming. I feel as though I am awakening from a long, restless sleep.

When I first arrived, a chattering red squirrel and some beeping nuthatches approached to greet me. They’ve since gone back to what they were doing, leaving me here to intoxicate myself with the rest of this living world around me.

The winds today are wonderful. They are brisk, but just the right degree of warm. They have pushed the waters of the lake up into small waves and swirls. A moment or two ago, I could hear the water splashing up against the base of these mighty rocks.

The wind has since shifted and the sound has died away. There isn’t a single cloud in the sky, but the moon is showing almost half its face.

I have encountered a curious visitor here. This is the second time this week I have seen it, which makes it twice as odd an occurrence. I want to know what its presence means, but I can’t figure it out.

American Indians interpreted sightings in nature as messages or harbingers of things to come – like how seeing an owl foretells death.

The creature I’ve seen once earlier this week in my yard, and here just a few moments ago in plain view, was an ovenbird.

In all my days, I’ve known ovenbirds best by their loud “*teacher-teacher-teacher*” calls from the depths of the hardwood forests.

They are shy birds, a type of warbler with a speckled breast and orange-peel crown, that build nests on the ground resembling ovens. Their backs are olive and brown.

I have only seen them a handful of times through my binoculars, and those views have been mostly quick and fleeting. These are birds that are far more often heard than seen.

To see two so close to me and so plainly, within such a short period of time, strikes me as strange and meaningful. I feel it is a good sign, but of what I can’t say.

Perhaps it’s a spirit of possibility, renewal, hope and faith?

Maybe, in that regard, a spirit of *wishing?*

I know this much – if I hadn’t decided to come up here this morning, I would not have been here to see it.

The confluence of events, time, people and things is one of the mysteries of life I would love to have a better handle on. I’d love to be able to pull back the clock face and find out how it all works. I don’t want to tinker. I just want to know.

Maybe one day, quantum mechanics will allow me to be two or more places at the same time. Theoretically, I guess that would hold true for the ovenbird too.

The floor of this little slice of heaven here is home to oak saplings, along with bracken ferns and berryless blueberry bushes. The pines along this ridge are tall, ragged sentinels that have withstood powerful storms year-round for many decades.

Several of their strong branches have been broken off or remain intact though snapped at crucial joints. In some cases, woodpeckers have taken a toll.

While I consider the relative permanence of these resilient creations, I am warned the battery on this laptop is running low.

So, begrudgingly, I will close this machine and make my way back down the informal pathway to the place where I parked my Jeep along the roadside.

I truly am awe-inspired at the power of these moments I have spent here today. Despite the countless times this place has rejuvenated me in the past, I must have somehow doubted its power somewhere inside me.

Again, in retrospect, I see I may have spent worrisome or sorrowful hours unnecessarily. I promise myself I will retain a memory of this day, kept hidden away for the worst of times.

I will remember this day for the good times too. This is a place where, like a young eagle learning to fly, I can hop and flap here along the ledge and look eagerly toward the sky.

I am grateful to whatever forces converged, in time and space, to bring me here to this place today. For weeks now, I never once pointed my boots in this direction.

I know now that I’ll be back again soon.

Maybe even tomorrow.

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