

The Soul of Nature

*Could a greater miracle take place than for us to look through
each other's eyes for an instant?*

Henry David Thoreau

Walden

Lewis visited Robbie a few days after the tenth moon and asked the boy if he would mind going for a walk at the park where they had first met. Robbie eagerly accepted.

As they walked, Lewis began with the usual array of questions concerning school and other general topics, with predictable replies. Then he posed a few questions to gauge what insight Robbie had gained from the stick, so that he might be able to assist him further.

"What do you think the most important thing is that you have learned from the stick at this point, Robbie?" Lewis posed.

"I don't think I can really say. I've learned so much. One thing I can say is that my eyes have been opened to many things I used to take for granted."

"Like what?"

"Well, just about everything. I've learned so much about history. I really like *The Story of Mankind* that you gave me. Before I met

you and Red Hawk, history was just a bunch of boring dates, names, and places in books. Now I realize that those names were real people with real feelings. I've learned quite a bit about war.

"I never used to think much about nature, either. I never really looked at the trees, or felt the air or the wind. I do now. The other book you gave me, *Silent Spring*, really helped me understand the balance of nature."

They arrived at a stream and sat down on a log. Lewis allowed the discussion to fade so they could listen to the stream. The boy was quite content to sit and listen to the voice of the water as well. After some ten minutes or so, Robbie finally said softly, "This is one of the things I've learned. I never understood the subtle sounds of nature. It's almost as if the stream can talk. Like it's alive."

Lewis smiled as Robbie continued.

"And the birds, the animals—even the insects. I never noticed any of that."

They listened some more.

"Well, Robbie, I'm glad to hear that. You know these big trees and certainly this little river have been here a lot longer than we have.

And they will be here much longer after we leave this world. Since I met Red Hawk all those years ago, I have marveled at the character of rivers, oceans, streams, and lakes. They are the sustainers of life and the roads of commerce. I remember being struck in *Het Achterhuis* by how young Anne had completely acquired sensitivity to nature."

Lewis stood to continue the walk and asked Robbie, "What do you think you've learned about the game?"

"Well, I certainly learned more than I could ever have imagined. It was so cool to see the Cherokee game, and your game against Army, and then this year's Army-Navy game. That ceremony at Hopkins was really amazing.

"Even though I've been playing for a couple years, I don't think I could have understood the ancient spirit of the game. You and Red Hawk have been a big help with that part. It's helped me with my game. I work a lot harder now than I used to. I think I understand what it means to 'Respect the Game.'"

"What do you think you've learned about yourself?"

Robbie thought for a prolonged period. "I think the biggest thing is the obligation I

have to others. I never used to think about that. I mean on my team, at home, at school. I think that's been a constant characteristic of the custodians of the stick. They worked so hard for others. I mean, Red Hawk saved his sister's life and took care of her. And Red Hawk's great-great grandfather gave and taught so much to his adopted grandson. Lieutenant Casey helped the Cherokees. Then Chamberlain could have killed Casey but didn't. He was there for his men despite being shot six times. Jack Turnbull gave his life for others. Doug Turnbull spent his life helping people—including you. And your service to the country and all you have done for me.

“I think the people before me have also been about action. They've done things. I think I've learned a lot about the importance of doing things. The stick has a pretty overwhelming history. I think I'm gonna have to try harder to live up to my part.”

Lewis smiled inwardly. He's getting it, he thought. That's pretty amazing for a boy so young. “You are doing great already, Robbie. I'm glad to hear your insights. How far have you gotten on the carvings?”

“I think I’ve made it through all of the carvings and the inscription.”

“Really? What does the writing say?”

“It says, ‘You must first master yourself...’”

“Were you able to find out about the rest of the saying?”

“Yes. I guess you know the other stick says, ‘before you can lead others.’”

“What do you think the inscription means? The part about mastering yourself.”

“I was hoping you might be able to tell me what you think.”

“Well, like many of the other issues presented by the stick, it took me a little while to really get in touch with this thought. I think what I’ve found after all these years is that it’s important to be prepared to overcome obstacles. At some point in their lives, most people find that the greatest difficulty they’ll face is themselves. They’ll get defeated by some external entity—school, work, personal issues—you name it. But the greatest difficulty is usually maintaining the confidence in yourself to move on and use the setback as an opportunity for growth. I suspect it’s terribly

easy for me to say these things and equally difficult for you to believe them. But it's at those difficult times that you must 'master yourself.' Once you have developed the ability to deal with external—and the subsequent internal—crises, then you'll be in a much better position to positively affect others. It's all about dealing with adversity, I think. What do you think?"

"That sounds good. Thanks."

"What else would you like to discuss?"

"How was it having the stick all those years? Did Red Hawk visit you every month the whole time?"

"Well, as you're already finding out, having the stick for forty-plus years was pretty cool. Just imagine how much you've learned since you got it and multiply it by forty. At all of the critical junctures in my life Red Hawk and Mr. Turnbull were there for me. They helped me a lot.

"And, yes, Red Hawk did visit me every month for the whole time. I know that you've been keeping a journal. Please keep doing that. I started mine after about four months because I didn't realize the dreams were real until then. So I went back and reconstructed the early

visits. I think I ended up with over 500 stories in there. I read through it every once in a while."

"Do you think I might be able to look at it sometime?"

"Sure. Remember, I'm here for you just as Mr. Turnbull was for me. My journal has some pretty cool stuff in it. Mr. Turnbull also sent me over a hundred letters. I keep all of it together."

"Do you miss not having the stick?"

"I miss Red Hawk more than I thought I might—but I'm thrilled that you're benefiting from his guidance. Mr. Turnbull shared the very same sentiment with me after a year or so."

They continued the discussion on the way back. When they arrived near their entry point, a soft, warm breeze swept by them. As always Lewis felt it immediately, and Robbie pointed it out a second later. "See, Captain Lewis, I can feel that breeze. Red Hawk has taught me to be sensitive to the wind." Lewis smiled.

Just then a young hawk landed on the brick wall adjacent to the path about thirty

yards ahead. The bird looked directly at Robbie and bobbed its head up and down several times. Robbie diverted his path slightly and approached the bird. Lewis stopped and looked on with a great deal of pride as Robbie responded to the silent beckoning of the hawk.

Robbie felt a rush of excitement as the bird communicated with him. The hawk bobbed its head again. Robbie bent over, extended his hand, and allowed the bird to climb on.

Robbie stared carefully into the bird's eyes for some time as it looked straight back. Robbie's gaze took him through the hawk's eyes and into its soul—indeed, into the very soul of Nature. At that instant, Robbie saw and felt his personal and intimate connection with all living things. This connection was far deeper even than his new-found sensitivity to the streams, winds, and trees. This was a living, breathing, moving, thinking organism not terribly unlike himself. What a magnificent creation, he thought.

Robbie considered the miracle of his own life. He made the mental leap to the preposterous notion of the millions of complex processes occurring at exactly the right time

and proper sequence within his own body. The chemical balance. His body temperature. His eyes. His organs and muscles. His breathing. His heartbeat. The flow of blood through his veins. For the first time, he became fully conscious of everything within himself. Robbie's life had changed yet again.

After a few minutes of silent exchanges, Robbie offered the hawk the telepathic reply: Our pleasure. He then sent the bird aloft into another soft, warm breeze which had just materialized.

"That was the same bird we met here last year," Robbie proclaimed confidently to Lewis as the bird kited up into the sky.

"How do you know?" asked the captain.

"She thanked us."