

## Epilogue

*To live in the hearts and minds of those we leave behind is  
not to die.*

United States Naval Academy

*Lucky Bag, 1983*

Long Island National Cemetery July 7, 2002

“O.K., girls, we can go now,” I whispered as I began walking softly and slowly to my car. Upon arriving there, I looked down expecting to see my seven-year-old daughter Catherine and my six-year-old niece Olivia on each of my hips, their appointed station all afternoon at a Long Island Ducks minor league baseball game.

I turned, instead, to see Catherine *hugging* the tombstone of my sister Marguerite, her face pressed sideways against the marble, her fingers interlaced on the back side—just able to reach all-the-way around. Olivia was kneeling before the stone of my mother, adjacent to her daughter’s, and staring softly at the inscription. The girls sat quietly, occasionally stealing a glance, seeking a cue from each other.

I stood frozen, watching these two girls alternately kneel, sit, and stand before the markers. They switched positions two or three

times and exchanged a few quiet words. Catherine was completely engrossed in Marguerite's marker. I watched her pat, caress, and hug the stone. I watched her trace out the letters delicately with her left index finger, as if reading Braille. I tried to identify the expression on her face and in her heart. It was not really sadness, I decided. It looked more like a longing to know this girl who, the marker confirmed, had died before her fifth birthday. A girl she never knew, a girl *I* never knew. A girl known to me only through a handful of pictures. My sister, yes, but who had died before I was born.

As I watched my daughter clinging to what was left of her deceased aunt and grandmother, my mind was unconsciously overtaken by uncanny parallels to the story of the stick.

I first saw Red Hawk clinging to his mother's body as the soldiers pulled her away.

Then as I considered my mother's gravestone overlooking that of the daughter who predeceased her, my mind's eye saw Mum and Douglas Turnbull's stone standing sentinel over Jack's at All Hallow's.

Next I remembered the lesson Red Hawk had shared with Robbie in regard to the polar opposites of life. How one emotion or experience cannot be reconciled without the other—hope and despair, good and evil, success and failure, pleasure and pain, ignorance and knowledge. My mind added the ultimate and inescapable pair, life and death.

As I continued to study the girls as they puzzled over the stones, I saw Robbie stepping back from Jack Turnbull's grave, pondering the twists of fate that called the great pilot to his premature rest.

My mind then had me consider the range of fortune represented, quite literally, beneath the girls' feet. Below my daughter and niece were a mother who had borne eight children, seven of whom (all boys) continue to live healthy lives, and who herself lived what could only be described as an abundantly fruitful, productive life, and her only daughter, lost at age four after a long illness, never to be known to four of her brothers. Polar opposites yet again.

As I felt Nature in all her glory—the beautiful day, the sun, the grass, the trees, the birds—I thought of the passage from Anne

Frank on the day Jimmy Lewis was born. I ruminated on the majesty, grandeur, and multiplicity of Nature. I joined in the reverence with which Red Hawk and all Indians held the Earth—the rhythm of their lives entwined so intimately with the rhythm of the Earth.

What a sight, watching those girls. The lives, the minds, the hearts, the lessons. The hope that filled me was overwhelming. The flood of thoughts, visions, and emotions made me realize all I had learned from the story manifested in the stick and in the lives of its remarkable custodians.

A warm breeze suddenly swept by, shaking me from my trance. A chill penetrated every part of my body. It was too remarkable, too eerie, and too *personal* to be a coincidence. It was Red Hawk. Miraculously I had just become part of the story myself. My mind raced back through my entire journey with Jim Lewis and Bruce Turnbull. I stood humbly thinking I was not worthy of their goodness in sharing their relationship with Red Hawk with me.

I looked up and thanked Red Hawk for bestowing an even higher honor upon me.

The girls finally came back, and Catherine stunned me by saying, “I don’t want to die, Daddy. But if I do, it’ll be O.K. because I’ll get to be with Marguerite and Nana.”

I stood silent a few seconds longer, reminding myself once again that I was the most fortunate father on Earth. I thought of what I have told Catherine many times: I hope someday you’ll get to love someone as much as Mom and I love you and your little brother. I added an unspoken addendum to that wish: I hope you’ll live long enough to experience something as sublime as I just had.

Finally, I climbed into my car—shaken yet solidified, humbled yet uplifted, scared yet secure, overwhelmed yet eased, emptied yet fulfilled, forever changed yet forever the same. Rededicated. Rededicated to the game of lacrosse, to Nature, to all who have helped and supported me along the way, to my family, friends, and colleagues, to my students, to my wife, and, mostly, to our children.