

“Sweet Solitude”



I have been fortunate in this life as Loneliness has been a stranger to me. My mother worked tirelessly to instill my sister and I with an ability to entertain ourselves. I was repeatedly instructed to go up to my room and amuse myself. To create, to read, to dig deep within myself to come up with a partner within to share life's sojourns. I suppose, Loneliness has been replaced by solitude in my life and my chapel of solitude was built upon the ship like peninsula of Camp Northway Lodge, which jutted out into cool Cache lake waters, one of the many lakes comprising the Algonquin Provincial Park in Northern Ontario.

I entered upon the majestic stretch of wilderness in my tenth summer, as had my mother during her early adolescence. A slow moving motorboat glided through the wind strewn waves passing the unpunctuated shorelines. A steady stand of mature conifer trees with lapping waves upon smooth gray boulders and smaller rocks drew my eyes and ears. As we rounded what seemed like an endless series of peninsulas we came upon the sound of metal clanging against the rope that tethered the large Maple Leaf flag at the camps point. At night the flag was brought down and the clanging of the ropes to the flag and the pole was replaced by the raised voices of singing campers, voices frolicking and colliding along familiar melodies punctuated by the crackles of the cedar and birch logs burning in the fire pit every clear weathered night on the point.

During the desolate hours of the day, the point was a choice spot where I could slither into and gather sunshine, the sounds of the lake lapping up against the rounded pebbles on the shallow lake bottom just beyond the point. Often I could capture the first glimpse of returning canoe trippers triumphantly returning with song and powerful pulls of their paddles.

There were no sounds spawned by electricity in these pieces of lovely wilderness. There were no road noises as the camp was over twenty minutes from the closest road. The solitude I garnered here came from the unpunctuated nature of things. No telephones, no driveways, or good humor men or drycleaners or school buses or utility people or barking dogs, bicycle bells, or the distant din of trains making their

way along the tracks. The only sound was the constant breeze's play along canvas tent flaps, the whispering of balsam boughs combed by the winds caress, the call of the haunting loon come nightfall and the closing in of the all too frequent nocturnal visitor the misquote to my ear. I drew pleasure from the smell of the clean earth below my feet and the generations of balsam falling upon the soil creating a cushion for my keds. I imagined the deer skin moccasins fashioned by long ago Algonquin speaking people, their footfalls along these very same paths I tread along. In my minds eye I saw their long hand crafted paddles stretching alongside their birch bark canoes as they traveled to favored hunting spots in these verdant and water driven environs.

The solitude was to me a lullaby, quelling whatever angst or tension the ten years I had collected on this spinning marvel of a globe. The sweet pull of the elements brought tears to my young eyes spontaneously, an awesome appreciation of my surroundings. I had time to think and to be. I had time to be a human being, not a human doing. There were no compulsory swimming, canoeing, arts and craft, or sailing classes. It was come as you wish. It was ebb and flow, and it was delightful.

My sweet solitude would be interrupted the moment my foot took hold of the bottom step of the private coach bus that pick me up along with my fellow campers for the long ride home. The smell of chemically treated toilet water wafted along the long stretch of seats from the rear right up to greet my nose upon entry. My nose whined for gone by balsam. The air in here laid stagnant between glass and ugly coach upholstery seating and what seems to be compulsory and relentlessly unattractive, busy, and clashing carpeting. The buzz and hum of the diesel engine added to the assault upon my senses. I felt both abandoned by nature and attacked by so-called civilization in this the hour of transition.

I saw more and more houses as we drove out of the park towards Huntsville, Ontario, the first town on the border of Algonquin Provincial Park. From their my solitude was ravaged, cut out and buried beneath mile upon mile of cars and tractor trailer trucks and moving outdoor advertising signs and horns and dirty air arriving on the heels of the upcoming metropolis of Toronto and the airport which would collect many campers en route to far away places like St. Louis Missouri and Nassau in the Bahamas. Gone were glimpses of tall pines, loons, and dragonflies, moose chipmunks, and beaver.

Many of the campers that had made their way off the bus stood clutching their beautiful blonde balsawood custom canoe paddles. Around their necks were tied red bandannas, an indication of their true identities as canoe trippers of the Canadian wilderness. By there feet lay stacked large olive and gold duffel bags awaiting real running washing machines. The scrub brushes and the camps many docks were the washing machines we left behind.

Tears and hugs combined as our numbers diminished as we progressing southward toward the U.S. Canadian border. Windsor, Niagara on the Lake, Buffalo, and finally

the Brighton High School parking lot in Rochester New York is where our grisly upholstered coach came to its terminus. Expectant parents looked up into opaque windows. We saw them. They couldn't see us---a kind of Customs experience... It gave us a chance to breath in the last moments of lake inspired solitude, cast off with each footfall on the metal stairs that lead to the parking lot.

It was a new world that was loud and awkward. There were noises of traffic and car radios. Gone were the temperate lake carried air currents; instead macadam sizzled raising the stench of its own unnatural odor. The tar acted as a mini incinerator, a sort of concentration camp to unsuspecting earth worms drawn from the earth in sudden rains and caught on the black tar to shake and bake.

It wasn't that we were sad to see those we loved. It was the loss of sweet solitude that we mourned. This kind of solitude can only be garnered in the quiet moments that nature spawns in moments where great lakeshore breezes work in symphony with the dwindling color changes in the skies that in turn draws out the cries of the lake loons.... The concert continues to the sound of the crackling cedar campfires and compels campers to gather round in choir of song and guitars and sweetness, such sweetness that it gurgles to the surfaces and radiates from the faces of those collected in a campfire choir circle.