

SNOW BIRDS . . .

A Story of Hope

**By David Spring
With Illustrations by Fred Redmon**

Snow Birds - A Story of Hope

- Why are hordes of gypsy moths suddenly devastating the forests in the Pacific Northwest?
- What do a group of Native Americans who were wiped out over a hundred years ago have to do with it?
- Why is an old miner, who hates gold, dancing in the moonlight with a bunch of ghosts?
- What do starfish, canaries and hummingbirds have in common with homeless children and dying salmon?
- Most importantly, are humans on the verge of causing their own demise by repeating the same mistake that led to the extinction of the dinosaurs 65 million years ago?

David Spring, a young college student on his first summer job, doesn't know the answer to any of these questions. What he does know is that a unique species of small white birds, which glow in the dark, are somehow the key to the entire mystery. He also knows that the mountain they live on is about to be blown up - and time is running out. But how can he save the planet when he can't even save himself? His only hope lies in learning the secret of the Snow Birds.

Dedication

***For children of all ages
May the glow of love in your heart
Be the light of salvation for the entire World.***

Legal Disclaimer

What you are about to read may be a true story. However, the names of some of the people have been changed in order to protect the guilty. It is their fault and not mine that all of this stuff happened. I am completely innocent.

Other Legal Stuff

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WHAT THIS BOOK IS ABOUT

You will probably recognize some of the events and places described in this book. Many of these incidents were covered by the media including the Gypsy moth invasion, the resulting Salvage Rider Act, and the infamous government shutdown of our federal forests the following winter. You may also have read articles about the Snow Birds in magazines or newspapers. However much of the truth about what happened was kept out of these media reports. This was in part because some of what happened was difficult to explain, and much of the rest was difficult to believe. Nonetheless, I think you have a right to know the whole story. Therefore in the following pages, I have done my best to describe for you what really happened, how it happened, and why it happened.

I have to admit I'm a little nervous about conveying this story. My fear is you may think I'm some kind of nut. But I want to assure you that I'm not a nut. I am just an everyday normal person who has been given the opportunity to experience some strange things. I hope you will put yourself in my place as you read these pages and give me the benefit of the doubt regarding this matter. Imagine what you would do if these strange things had happened to you. I have decided to tell you the truth and let the chips fall where they may.

I am taking this risk because I believe this story is important. It needs to be told so that its message is not forgotten or misunderstood. Even I originally thought this story was about saving Old Growth forests and Endangered Species. But, in hindsight, I now realize it is about more than that ... it's about saving us.

Snow Birds ... A Story of Hope

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PART ONE

SUMMER

*Drawing of the sun
Rising over snow covered mountains*

*As sure as summer sun melts mountain snow
And melting snow makes rivers flow
So will you come to learn what flowers know
When your heart is warmed by alpenglow*

Chapter One ... Starfish and Gypsy Moths

*"I stood on the highest mountain ... and I knew more than I saw...
and I understood more than I knew... because I was seeing in a Sacred Way."*

Black Elk (Black Elk Speaks)

Native Americans have often observed that their White Brothers "have eyes, but cannot see". Assuming this is true, have you ever wondered what it is we aren't seeing? One Native American, an old Spirit Chief named White Bird, called it "Hearing with the Heart and Seeing with the Soul". According to him, one learns to see through a kind of waking dream called a Vision Quest. This involves going out alone into the mountains on a "vision quest" in order to discover that which is most sacred and true.

Of course, when this whole journey started I knew nothing of vision quests or Native Americans. Although I was as blind as any one has ever been, I had no awareness of my disability. It is only now, standing on a slightly higher hill gained more through the passage of time than through any insight of mine, that I have begun to see things a little more clearly than I did back then. And what I see whenever I think of that first day is a young man who knew nothing of Starfish and Gypsy Moths. Or the entire convoluted chain of events that were to follow. He is struggling up a hill, completely out of breath. He is climbing the long chain of stairs that lead from the Lower Campus to the Upper Campus at Washington State University. He is running because he is late. He is late because he overslept. And he overslept because, although he does not yet know it, he is a Dreamer.

A bright sun, rising on the eastern horizon, was already giving notice that this would be another hot day in the Palouse Hills. Signs of the season changing from Spring to Summer are all around him. Above him, geese are flying north - as if to point his way. After stopping for a moment to regain his breathe, he hurries past small birds singing among the fragrant pink blossoms of large old cherry trees which line both sides of his path. Had this been some other morning, he might have stopped or at least slowed down long enough to enjoy the blossoms. But this was not just any morning and the truth is he hardly noticed the rising sun, the birds or the blossoms. And even had he noticed, he would have known nothing of their significance.

His mind was on more urgent matters. In a moment of sheer lunacy and completely out of his normally reserved character, he had scheduled an appointment to see the chairman of the Biology Department. His intention was to find out which courses he should take during his upcoming senior year in order to maximize his chances of getting into Graduate school – but fate had other things in mind for him that morning...

"This is ridiculous," I muttered. The one day I absolutely had to be on time and yet somehow I overslept! What had gone wrong? Had I failed to set my alarm? Did it not go off? I had no idea.When I realized what happened, I panicked. My worst nightmare was now coming true. With my mind racing as fast as my feet, I became increasingly aware of my predicament. I had left the house in such a rush that my hair wasn't combed. I had forgotten to shave. I was sweating profusely – and I wasn't even in the building yet.

"Completely ridiculous," my mind continued. The only time Hazelwood had open was 7:30 am, a half hour before classes even started. I glanced at my watch. It was 7:30 now. So much for my plan of being early.

I rushed through the nearly deserted campus and quickly past a small wooden sign, half buried in bushes, which read "Olson Hall." That may have been the building's official name, but for some reason everyone simply called it the "Old Science Building." Why the Biology department was located here was beyond me. The massive, archaic, three-story structure was one of the oldest, most run-down buildings on campus.

The "New Science Building", which housed the Physics and Chemistry department, was by sharp contrast a modern, brightly lit office building with well-equipped laboratories and computers in almost every classroom. It was several stories taller and, since it was thoughtfully located further down the hill in the more modern part of campus, it was much easier to walk to. So why the Biology department remained behind in this crumbling old relic was difficult to comprehend. Every time I climbed that hill, I thought "What a stupid place to put a building – right at the top of the highest hill on campus!" It was enough to make one want to change majors.

I climbed the cracked concrete steps and opened the large, heavy entrance door. It was noticeably darker inside the building than out. What little light there was came from extremely high, tinted windows which, along with the vaulted ceilings, rose at least sixteen feet above each floor. The tall windows must have been impossible to clean – since they apparently never were. It was those same huge, dingy windows that gave the old building the look and feel of a gothic cathedral – as dark and foreboding inside as it was run down outside.

The Old Science Building had evidently been built before elevators were invented. The new building had elevators; but in this ancient structure, one went up the old fashioned way – by climbing the wide, spiraling flights of stairs located in the center of the building. Even worse, thanks to the incredibly high ceilings, one had to climb the equivalent of six stories just to reach the third floor.

The stair treads and landings, like the floors on each level, were made of a gray polished marble, which magnified the sound of my steps. As I began my ascent, the sound echoed in the otherwise quiet, hollow chamber formed by the spiraling stairs.

"Utterly ridiculous," I mumbled out loud although (or perhaps because) no one was around to hear me. I paused part way up the stairs to catch my breath. I often thought while climbing these steps that whoever designed this torture chamber must have been a mountaineer. They obviously derived a perverse pleasure in climbing uphill – and in requiring others to do the same.

By the time I reached the top floor, my heart was pounding noticeably and my whole body was shaking. I felt sick and a little dizzy. But it wasn't just from climbing the stairs. I was nervous. To be more honest, I was petrified.

"This is ridiculous," I again told myself. Only this time I was referring to my uncontrollable shaking – or perhaps it was in reference to the appointment itself. In either case, it was too late to turn back now.

I slowly approached Hazelwood's office and noticed the door was partially open. Meekly looking in, I breathed a sigh of relief. Hazelwood was not there yet.

"Thank God," I whispered. At the very least, I now had time to pull myself together. Maybe he wouldn't even notice I was late. With any luck, he might have forgotten about our appointment all together!

I was way too nervous to sit down, so instead I paced around the small room and finally settled by the window in the corner opposite the door.

Hazelwood's office was located in the southeast corner of the building and the sun was shining through the large corner window. Looking out, I saw the rolling Palouse hills and, plainly visible in the distance, on the eastern horizon appeared the jumbled maze of peaks called the Border Range.

Although it was now well into May, the reflection of the morning sun showed the highest mountains were still covered with snow. The awesome view included over a hundred miles of nameless shining mountains separated by several deep and shadowed valleys.

I tried to draw some inspiration from their quiet and peaceful beauty. As I looked at those majestic rugged peaks, I took a deep breath and thought, "I have got to calm down."

The wall between the door and the window was filled, from floor to ceiling, with hundreds of different biology books. I had been here a couple of times before and I knew that some of those books had actually been written by Hazelwood.

But thinking of this only made me more apprehensive. "Doc," as everyone called him, was more than simply the Chairman of the department; he was also a highly respected Rhodes Scholar and a member of the Presidential Task Force which was to oversee the new Forest plan.

As I looked at the wall of books in front of me, I wondered, "Could it be that he's actually read every one of them?" My insecurity was growing by the minute.

I tried to reassure myself, "What's the worst that could happen?" But it was no use. The worst that could happen was that he would laugh in my face.

My biggest goal in life was to go to Grad School. I knew Hazelwood was on the committee that decided who would get in. I simply wanted to ask him how I could increase my chances of being one of the few who were chosen. So why was I so scared? It was only my entire future that was at stake here.

Just then, Tweety, one of Doc's pet cockateels broke the silence by confidently chanting, "Tweety bird! Pretty bird!" Tweety and Sweety were tiny white birds who lived in a very large bird cage which sat securely on top of the file cabinets in the other corner of the room next to Doc's desk.

Tweety calmly hopped down from his perch and over to his feeder. God only knows how many different phrases Tweety could say. He was a real talker and had an incredible sense of humor. In the past, I had seen him carry on an entire conversation with Doc. Together, they had developed quite a routine. Above him, his mate Sweety, slept silently on the highest perch. She never said a word.

"Perhaps," I wondered, "that's why I always thought of her as the smarter of the two."

As I watched Tweety slowly eat his food, it reminded me of the knot growing in my stomach.

"If only I could be as calm as that bird." But instead I felt like a condemned prisoner waiting for the hangman to arrive. I could not have been more afraid had I actually been facing my own death. As I took another deep breath, the executioner suddenly walked through the still open door.

"Hi, Dave. Sorry I'm late." Hazelwood shook my hand firmly, sat down at his chair and swiveled it toward me. Then he continued. "Pull up a seat."

I sat down as he asked, "So, what's up?"

I had already practiced asking the question several times. I imagine by this point it sounded as mechanical and hollow as it felt: "Well, I'm trying to figure out... what I can do... to increase my chances... of getting into Grad School... and I'm hoping... you could give me some advice."

There was an awkward silence at the abrupt end of my speech. Then, to my surprise and relief, Hazelwood smiled and said, "That's a good question."

He paused for a moment. Then, reaching into a drawer beside his desk, he pulled out a rather large stack of papers perhaps three to four inches thick.

He flopped the entire pile down on his desk and said, "There are over a hundred applications here. Each of them was submitted by someone who wants to get into Grad School. I get a stack like this every month. Last year, we had over a thousand applicants for only ten openings. The hardest part is that all of these applications look exactly the same. Virtually all of them have good grades, good recommendations and high scores on their entrance exams."

Doc turned toward me. Then, looking right at me, he asked, "Tell me, Dave, how would you decide who gets in and who doesn't?"

I didn't know what to say. My mind was in shock. I had known it was going to be difficult getting into Grad School; but until that very moment, I hadn't realized how slim my chances really were. All I could think was "only one in a hundred," but I said nothing at all.

Fortunately Doc continued, "I'll tell you a secret Dave. There's really only one way to choose ... and that's to look for someone who's different."

Doc paused for a moment to let his observation sink in, then he continued, "So my advice is – if you really want to go to Grad School – then make yourself different. Be different. Do something different."

"I don't quite know what you mean," I was still in shock.

Doc fumbled through the clutter of papers in his briefcase, eventually pulling one of them out.

"Here," he said, "this is what I mean. It's a summer job researching the gypsy moth invasion that's been killing off the forests over in Idaho. Now that's something different."

Doc handed me the letter describing the job offer. It was printed on official-looking U.S. Forest Service stationery. "Think it over, Dave. If you want the job, I'd be happy to recommend you. I can't guarantee it will get you into Grad School, but it certainly couldn't hurt."

As I got up to leave, I admitted "Doc, I don't know if I can be different."

Doc stood up and followed me out his office door. Then he put his arm on my shoulder and said, "Dave, don't underestimate yourself. Very few students have ever had the courage to come in here and ask for my advice. That's why I gave you that letter," he smiled encouragingly, "because you already are different."

* * *

As I left Hazelwood's office, my head was spinning. I was elated because I had just received a high compliment from someone I greatly admired; but at the same time I knew I was not as courageous as he made me out to be. In fact, fear was the main reason I wanted to go to Grad School to begin with. I was afraid of my future. If I didn't get into Grad School, what else would I do? What else could I do?

The more I thought about it, the more I realized my meeting with Hazelwood had been a disaster. "Be different," he said. How could I do that? I had always thought of myself as the bell-curve kid. I was never the dumbest student, but neither was I the brightest. The only reason I got good grades was because I spent more time studying than anyone else. I had only one strength... I actually enjoyed learning. While other students might spend their free time playing video games or watching TV, I spent mine reading books. My favorite place on campus was the Biology department library.

But this is also where my fear came from. The more I learned, the more I realized how much there was to learn. I became painfully aware of my own ignorance. Whoever said that "ignorance was bliss" obviously didn't know what they were talking about! That is why I wanted to go to Grad School. I hoped I might overcome my own ignorance. I reasoned that, if I studied a few more years, I could begin to understand all those things which I currently did not understand. But after talking with Hazelwood, I realized that the odds of me getting in were pretty remote. I had no idea there would be so many other applicants.

But the worst part was that job offer. There was absolutely no way I could accept it. I had to turn down Hazelwood's offer, even if it meant the end of my chances of going to Grad School.

The problem was simple. I hate moths ... any moths. The mere thought of them makes me want to throw up. They've got to be the most grotesque and horrible creatures on Earth. And these gypsy moths were the worst, most disgusting kind. I didn't know much about them, but just from reading the newspaper I knew they descended on trees in massive hordes, devouring everything in sight. I couldn't imagine spending even a single day with them, much less my whole summer.

"Why?" I wondered, "Why did it have to be gypsy moths that were destroying the forest? Why couldn't it have been something more pleasant like bats or snakes or spiders? Even worms or slugs would have been okay. But gypsy moths ... the whole idea of being surrounded by these awful fluttering hordes was just too repulsive to even consider. As much as I appreciated Doc's offer, there was no way I could accept that job. I would simply have to be different in some other more tolerable way."

So now my problem was figuring out how to politely decline Doc's job offer. After nearly a week of agonizing about it in private, I decided to share my dilemma with my girl friend, Chris. Now if visiting Hazelwood had been my first mistake, then asking for Chris's help was clearly my second. I showed her the letter with the naïve hope she might come up with some kind of clever excuse for me to tell Hazelwood (other than admitting the truth – that I was afraid of moths). But instead, she turned on me.

I can still hear her saying it, "Please, Dave, you've got to take that job. The trees are counting on you."

I have no idea where she came up with lines like that; but I have to admit that Chris always was much wiser than me, at least when it came to anything that really mattered.

I remember thinking, ... "This is what I get for falling in love with an avid environmentalist." It was always "Save the Forest" or "Save the Wolves" or "Save the Whales." She would tell me, "David, you've got to call the papers," or "David, you've got to write your Congressman."

I should have known the first time I saw that poster on her wall with the salmon swimming up stream and the caption at the bottom that read "Torpedo the Dams ... Full Speed Ahead!" Chris even warned me when we first met that she was "Trouble with a Capital T" ...and she was right. I had known her for only a few months, but I had already written more letters to politicians than most people write in a lifetime. It was getting so the other students at the protest rallies knew me on a first name basis.

Chris belonged to over a dozen different environmental groups. She seemed to be on every "sucker" mailing list in the country. Not a day went by without some letter showing up in her mailbox asking for money to help yet another worthy cause. The letter would typically include a picture of a baby penguin or a bear cub ... and a caption underneath the picture that read, "Won't you please help me?" Chris was flat broke, but she would dutifully put her last dollar in the return envelope and send it in.

While I greatly admired her caring and devotion to her cause, I sometimes questioned whether her generosity did any good. Once, after I had protested that her measly couple of dollars couldn't possibly make any difference, Chris told me her "Starfish" story.

It was about a young kid and an old man who were walking on a beach after high tide. It seems there had been a bad storm and hundreds of starfish had washed up onto the shore. There were dying starfish everywhere. As the two fellows walked down the beach, the old man was constantly stopping and bending over to pick up a starfish. He would then gently toss the starfish back in the ocean that it might live. The young kid, realizing the hopelessness of the task, just kept walking. Finally he lost his patience with the old man, who was still picking up starfish and tossing them back in the ocean. The young kid told the old man that what he was doing was crazy and that it couldn't possibly make any difference whether a few starfish were tossed back into the ocean or not. The old man calmly picked up another starfish and threw it back in the ocean. He then smiled at the young kid and said, "Well, it made a difference to THAT starfish." Then he picked up another starfish, threw it back and said, "And it made a difference to THAT starfish too!"

Anyway, you can see what I was up against. With logic like that, I didn't have a chance. The crazy thing is I wasn't an "eco-nut" at all. I had no interest in the battle to save anything. I was more interested in studying science than fighting "causes." Who was I to be forming opinions about who was right and who was wrong? It was hard enough just to figure out why things were the way they were than to assume the additional burden of worrying about how to change things or how to make things the way they ought to be.

Still there was Chris talking about the trees and how much they needed my help. It wasn't so much the tone in her voice as the look in her eyes which made it clear to me that I really had no choice in this matter. I was stuck with it. I had to take that job.

So, because of a bunch of starfish, I was now going to spend my entire summer studying gypsy moths.

That innocent letter Hazelwood had given me really was my death sentence. Like a fish to a lure, I had taken the bait and been drawn into a series of events that were already beyond my understanding or control. I was hooked and there was no escape. I had been trapped by some kind of diabolical plot. Perhaps that's why my body was shaking so much that morning on my way to his office. Maybe it knew what was about to come. My instincts were right. Hazelwood had been the executioner after all.

Chapter Two ... The Dreamers and The Hermit

*Here in these protected groves are secret answers
to questions you have not yet dreamed of asking.*
William Dietrich, *The Final Forest*

I don't know if there even were other applicants, but in any case I got the job. The moth study was to take place in the Border Range Wilderness in Central Idaho and I was instructed to report to the Salmon Falls Ranger Station just north of the town of Salmon Falls as soon as my final exams were finished.

Salmon Falls may have been the closest town to the Border Range, but it was as far removed from the rest of the world as any town could be. There was only one paved road which went to Salmon Falls – the road over Nez Perce Pass – and this was served by a small independent bus line that made the trip exactly three times a week.

Around the beginning of June, I was on that bus. Even though Salmon Falls is barely one hundred miles east of the State University, the bus ride took nearly six hours; this owing to the necessity of traveling completely around the north end of the Border Range. At the time, it seemed a bit odd there was not a more direct route, but evidently the ruggedness of the terrain required this incredible several hundred mile detour.

Hazelwood had been kind enough to loan me a book on the history of the Border Range. During the long bus ride, after I tired of the monotony of watching the Palouse Hills roll past my window, I pulled the book out of my pack and started reading. The book explained that this region had once played a pivotal role in U.S. history. I was already aware of the instrumental role the Lewis and Clark expedition had served in securing the states of Oregon, Washington and Idaho for the United States. Had it not been for their incredible journey, this area would have probably wound up being a British or Canadian province. According to this book however, back in the fall of 1805 the Lewis and Clark expedition was on the verge of complete failure. The small group of explorers were hopelessly lost in the Border Range Mountains. They were freezing and starving. Winter was fast approaching. Amazingly, they were saved at the very last moment by a group of Native Americans whom we now call the Nez Perce. This group of Indians, who referred to themselves as the Dreamers, took in the starving explorers and nursed them back to health. Then, when the explorers explained that they wanted to get to the "Big Water" (the ocean), the Dreamers led them through their mountains and down the Salmon river to its junction with the Columbia. There, they arranged for another tribe to take the explorers all the way to the ocean. They even left some members of their tribe at the Columbia to guide the expedition back through the Border Range during the expedition's eastward return trip the following spring.

This unusual act of kindness did not go unnoticed by Congress. Lewis and Clark had reported that the Dreamers were the largest of all the tribes of the Pacific Northwest numbering over six thousand. They were also peaceful, intelligent and well organized. Most importantly, they were receptive to helping white travelers passing through their territory. Therefore when the Oregon Territory was finally organized in 1848, Congress set aside nearly the entire State of Idaho as a homeland for these friendly Natives. This arrangement was formally recognized when both Congress and the Nez Perce ratified the Treaty of 1855. Since the natives had a different concept of time than the Americans, the language in the treaty said that it would last, "as long as the Salmon river flowed."

Unfortunately, gold was discovered in the Border Range shortly after the Civil War and thousands of miners, ignoring the treaty, started pouring in. When clashes broke out between the miners and Indians, the U.S. Army was brought in to restore law and order. General Howard, a famous general who had one of his arms shot off in the Civil War, was given the delicate task of renegotiating a treaty his side had already broken.

At a Treaty Council that was held in 1868 near the junction where the Clearwater and Salmon Rivers flowed into the Columbia River, the General listened as the Dreamer's "Spirit Chief," an old man named White Bird, explained the problem. White Bird began his speech humorously by noting that the water still flowed in the Salmon River. He explained that the Dreamers did not mind the Whites coming to their land – which he called "the land of the winding waters." His complaint was simply that the miners had a bad habit of chopping down trees and digging massive holes in the earth. It was these transgressions that had led to the clashes. Evidently, the Dreamers believed "the trees were their Grandfathers and the earth was their Grandmother." White Bird explained that their Grandfathers lived inside the trees and somehow spoke to the Dreamers through the trees, giving them secret powers and wise advice. The Dreamers viewed cutting down the ancient trees as a type of sacrilege or even murder.

White Bird said many Dreamers were outraged that the miners had killed some of their "wooden people," inferring that the old trees were actually honored members of their tribe. The Dreamers also believed the trees were "as important to their Grandmother as feathers are to the life of a bird." He pointed out "if you pluck the feathers off of a bird, the bird itself would die." He maintained their "Grandmother needed her trees and would die without them."

For similar reasons, the Dreamers were opposed to the massive holes being dug by the miners. He noted, "if you dig holes into the skin of a person, the person could become sick and die." As the Dreamers saw it, the mining holes were like making fatal wounds in the skin of their Grandmother.

The miners countered this argument by saying, "the Whites have a sickness which can only be cured by possessing the yellow rocks."

The Dreamers, as a compromise gesture, replied they were willing to give the whites any yellow rocks that were laying on the ground or next to the streams and rivers. The Dreamers were willing to share their land with the their white brothers if only the Whites would agree to not cut down any more trees or dig any more holes.

The miners insisted that the Border Range contained millions of dollars in gold and absolutely nothing would stop them from getting it out.

General Howard, desperate to resolve the crisis peacefully, offered the Nez Perce several million dollars to leave their homeland and settle on a new reservation in the Palouse foothills to the west of the Border Range. The Dreamers refused the General's offer. They said their sacred mountains were "not for sale at any price."

White Bird, at this point, asked the General: "Would you sell your grandfather or your grandmother?"

The General, in a rather famous reply, said, "Yes, I would sell my own grandmother if it would bring us peace." The Natives were shocked and surprised by the General's answer. They asked that the negotiations be suspended for the day so they could consider the meaning of the General's words.

Several days of arguing passed. The negotiations were going nowhere. The Whites and Natives could not understand the other's point of view much less reach an agreement they were both happy with.

After listening to yet another Dreamer explaining at length the need to listen to and protect the trees, General Howard got angry and said he was tired of hearing about this Dreamer religion, calling it "a bunch of Mother Earth nonsense."

White Bird replied that the Whites "have eyes but cannot see and have ears but cannot hear. You offer us some of your green paper for our home if we will move down closer to your village. But I have been to your village. I noticed many things. It is all dust and noise. Where are the wooden people and the singing birds? They are killed to make the boxes you live in. Everyone is in a hurry, but no one knows where they are going.

"You call our religion a bunch of Mother Earth nonsense. Perhaps this is why the Great Spirit gave us the land of the winding waters. He knew we would protect this place and not cut down trees or dig holes. The Great Spirit also gave land to our White brothers. But they ignored the wisdom of the Great Spirit and destroyed what they had been given. This is why they had to leave their land and go in search of a new place to call home.

"Now you come across the great water and say you will trade us green paper for our home. You tell us the green paper will help us become more like you. But why should we become like you? We are happy and you are not. We do not need the yellow rocks or any other ways of our White brothers. Our grandmother Earth willingly gives us all the grain and berries we can eat. You can keep your green paper. We would rather have our green trees. "

White Bird then turned to the other Dreamers gathered at the table and speaking sternly declared, "Listen to me my brothers. How can you teach the blind to see or the deaf to hear? Until they learn to dream, they will not know the truth. A flower cannot bloom in Winter. Instead it must wait for Spring. So we too must wait for one who will dream and listen. I have come to this council to speak from my heart. I have no more to say."

Finally, the General persuaded one of the Nez Perce (an Indian appropriately nicknamed Lawyer) to sign the new treaty. As an inducement for signing, Lawyer's homeland was made the location of the new reservation. It turned out that Lawyer's band of Nez Perce already lived near the Palouse foothills and therefore he had nothing to lose by signing.

The Dreamers however said they would not honor the new treaty, which they called the "Thieves" treaty. Chief Joseph, their Peace Chief, said "Just because someone else signs a piece of paper that says you can have my horse does not mean you have a right to take my horse. It was not their horse to give away ... and neither is our Sacred Land."

Chief Looking Glass, the War Chief of the Dreamers and leader of the Clearwater River band, warned the General that he would defend the Sacred Mountains with his life.

White Bird, the Spirit Chief of the Dreamers and leader of the Salmon River band, said the Dreamers would not negotiate with "those who could not tell the difference between the truth and a lie." With that, the Dreamers broke off negotiations and returned to the Border Range.

In 1877, after the Dreamers had ignored several ultimatums to relocate to the Palouse reservation, a full-scale war, called the Nez Perce War, broke out. The Dreamers, like most natives who came in contact with the Whites had been decimated by illness. They now numbered less than eight hundred people, including fewer than two hundred men with the rest being women, children and the elderly. They had gathered on a high prairie at the beginning of summer to gather berries and celebrate the summer solstice. Suddenly, they were attacked by over five hundred well-armed U.S. troops. Miraculously, the Dreamers (most of whom were armed only with rocks) rallied and drove off the troops. A few days later, the troops launched another attack and again the Dreamers won the battle, even though they were out numbered at least three to one.

Despite their victories, the Dreamers quickly realized the hopelessness of their situation. They reluctantly decided to leave their homeland and join Sitting Bull and the Lakota Sioux, who had managed to escape the Army following the Battle of Little Bighorn by heading up to Canada. Unfortunately, after several battles and despite four months of journeying over one thousand five hundred miles through Idaho, Wyoming and Montana, the Nez Perce were finally surrounded by nearly a thousand U.S. troops only a few miles from the Canadian border. The Dreamers had stopped running because they were tired and because they believed they were already in Canada. On October 4th, the Army attacked from all sides, this time wiping out the Dreamers in the final battle.

Chief Joseph, who was the caretaker of the elderly, the women and children, put up the white flag to negotiate a truce.The U.S. commander, General Miles, promised the Nez Perce a safe passage back to their homeland if they would lay down their arms. Chief Joseph then gave his famous surrender speech:

"I am tired of fighting. Looking Glass is dead. My own brother is dead. It is cold and we have no blankets. Our little children are freezing to death. Hear me, my chiefs ... my heart is sick and I am sad. From where the sun now stands, I will fight no more forever!"

But the tragedy was just beginning for the Nez Perce. The mining lobby, which basically ran Washington D.C. opposed the idea of returning the Dreamers to Idaho. Instead, the miners insisted that the Nez Perce be shipped off to the Indian territory in Oklahoma. But the Nez Perce, being from the mountains, could not adapt to the heat of the Oklahoma desert. In the short span of only three years almost the entire tribe died off. Chief Joseph said his people died as quickly as "snow melting in the summer sun."

For over twenty years, Chief Joseph lobbied Congress to honor the pledge that had been given by General Miles. He begged Congress to allow the small remnant of his tribe to return to their Sacred Mountains, the land of the winding waters. But despite lobbying efforts and the support of several East coast religious groups, the old chief's requests were denied. On September 21st, 1904, Chief Joseph died in his teepee at an Indian agency. Dr. Latham, the agency physician listed the official cause of death as "a broken heart."

Meanwhile, Salmon Falls grew rapidly as a result of all the gold, most of which was collected there before being transported by land to banks back east. Over 20 billion dollars in gold was taken from the Border Range. This money transformed America, from a state of near bankruptcy at the end of the Civil War, into one of the richest most powerful nations on Earth.

However, in less than 50 years, all the gold had been mined and Salmon Falls turned from being a mining town to being a timber town. As quickly as the miners moved on to the Alaska gold fields, they were replaced by loggers. Eventually, all the accessible trees were logged off. Most of the loggers left and Salmon Falls became practically a ghost town.

Today, the only remaining commercial activities of note are some small farms and some rafting companies, who bring groups of tourists in every summer to raft down the middle fork of the Salmon River (which is appropriately called the River of No Return).

The hum of the bus engine increased noticeably just as I finished reading the history book. The small dilapidated bus was climbing a steep, winding grade. Below and to the east I could see the flat barren plains of Montana.

Finally the road leveled out as we approached a small green sign which read "Nez Perce Pass, Elevation 5180 feet."

Although we would be in Salmon Falls in less than an hour, the bus stopped briefly at a wide paved view point so that the few of us who were still on it could stretch our legs. I got out and walked away from the bus to the edge of the road, a distance of perhaps twenty yards.

As I stood there alone next to the guard rail, with the bus now behind me, I watched the sun setting over the Border Range. The valleys to the west were all shrouded in fog and therefore hidden from view. This gave the mountains in front of me a mystical appearance, like a magical island floating in mid-air. Though it was early June, the snow still glistened on the Central Peaks. They seemed so close that I could almost reach out and touch them.

As a warm steady breeze came out of the West, my eyes unexpectedly filled with tears. I was no longer looking at the Border Range. Instead, I was seeing the Sacred Mountains of the Dreamers ... the land of winding waters ... a place that was "not for sale at any price."

* * *

My reception at the Ranger Station was, shall we say, less than cordial. It seems that my presence here was more or less forced upon the local staff by some eco-radicals in Congress who had included this study as a mandatory requirement in the Forest Service budget. As luck would have it, our newly elected President had appointed a "Spotted-Owl" lover as head of the Forest Service. This same fellow, who was now in charge of the Forest Service, had done some studies in Oregon which showed that we were running out of Spotted Owls. That study, together with the Endangered Species Act, led directly to a reduction in logging and a lot of lay-offs right here in Salmon Falls - including lay-offs at the Ranger Station. Needless to say, the staff wasn't too pleased about their new boss, particularly the old-timers (who were basically the only ones left after all the cutbacks). Then, along I came, a young "smart-ass" college kid hired by a bunch of Washington, D.C. liberals to study the local moths; so of course I wound up being the fall guy. I wasn't given a chance to explain that I wasn't an environmentalist ... or that I didn't even want the job. I was simply (and politely) escorted to a back room with only one light and not a single window. It's only furnishings were a chair and an old table that was evidently intended to act as my desk. That bleak room, which wasn't much bigger than your average closet, was the staff's way of telling me how they felt about me and the job I had been hired to do.

The atmosphere around the Ranger Station was so hostile that I would have left for the Border Range the day I arrived ... if only the moth traps had shown up on time. Unfortunately there was a slight delay in getting the chemical used to scent the small cardboard traps. The shipment would not arrive for another week. I tried to make the best of this awkward situation. I resolved to use my time as productively as I could. The Ranger Station had a small library where I found several maps and a hiking guide book to the Border Range. The hiking guide said the Border Range wilderness was "the largest unprotected wilderness area remaining in the contiguous United States." Although the range was technically part of the Rocky Mountains, it was in fact a separate and isolated group of peaks considerably west of the rest of the Rockies.

The Border Range contained two major river systems, both of which flowed westward from the crest and emptied into the Columbia River after journeying about one hundred miles each. The northern half of the Border range was drained by the Clearwater River and the southern half by the Salmon River.

Looking at the map, the terrain itself was virtually impossible to figure out. Rivers and creeks spiraled out from the central peaks in a confusing maze that defied any sense of order or explanation. It looked like a giant jigsaw puzzle. I could see now

why there were no roads through it. It was surrounded by high cliffs and deep river gorges on all sides. In fact, its inaccessibility was the main reason this wilderness was still intact. The huge trees in this forest were worth a fortune – and increasing in value every day. But the loggers eventually gave up trying to get them out; because getting at them, in the absence of roads, was impossible.

I also read about the previous year's gypsy moth surveys. The basic conclusion of those studies was that the gypsy moth invasion was now widespread throughout the Pacific Northwest. Their populations were increasing rapidly in virtually every forest in Washington, Oregon and Idaho. In fact, only one notable exception had been found to this ominous trend and that was in the Border Range.

Curiously, despite setting traps all around the perimeter of the Border Range wilderness, there wasn't a single gypsy moth found here. My assignment, if you could call it that, was to solve this mystery.

"What a joke," I thought, "sending a young college kid who knows next to nothing into the wilderness in order to solve an impending ecological catastrophe."

But I guess I was the best they could get for a thousand bucks a month plus room and board. Hazelwood had told me before I left that, given the current hostile attitude in Congress toward ecological research, they were lucky to get any funding at all for this project. Still the job seemed simple enough. All I really had to do was hike in to the heart of the Border Range, collect a bunch of moths and bark samples, and send them back to the State University for analysis.

It was also during my week of waiting that I began to learn a little about Old Lou. The staff at the Ranger Station had been constantly joking about how I might get my throat slit by a crazy hermit who lived out in the Border Range. Uncertain if they were serious or merely pulling my leg, I inquired about him when I went to town to get some last minute supplies.

It turned out that old Lou was something of a local legend in Salmon Falls. Almost everybody knew him and virtually nobody liked him. Still, they all had their own unique story about him and were perfectly willing to share it with me. Lou owned a mining claim up in the Border Range Wilderness. The land of course belonged to the Forest Service, but thanks to a turn-of-the-century mining law and the hard work of his father and mother the mineral rights belonged to Lou.

While this crusty old hermit seldom came down to Salmon Falls, it wasn't because he was so busy at his gold mine. To the contrary, he barely found enough gold up there to pay for his semi-annual food runs. The joke in town was that old Lou's mule Buck was better at finding grass than Lou was at finding gold. Folks said the real reason he didn't visit town was simply because he was such a recluse. Even when he did come down to Salmon Falls, he never talked to anyone and no one ever talked to him.

It seemed strange to me that anyone would want to live their life so isolated and alone up in the mountains, but I gradually came to understand how this situation had evolved. Rumor had it that Lou's father had married a Native American woman when he moved out here and staked his claim. Though no one elaborated much, I understood the hidden message behind this story. The implication was that Lou was a "half-breed." It was clear the townsfolk had a low regard for Native Americans and held this against old Lou. This subtle form of discrimination no doubt was at least partly to blame for Lou's reputation as a "hermit."

While the history of Salmon Falls had been well documented, Lou's past was a little less clear. Many folks insisted that Lou was the devil himself – a wild and crazy savage, lacking any sense of civilized decency.

One person told me that many years ago, when he was a boy, two of his friends had gone out hiking in the Border Range and never returned. It was his opinion that

Lou had “done them both in.” He said the reason their bodies were never found was because “Lou ate them.”

Other folks, however, laughed when I told them that story. They said Lou was just a smelly but harmless old goat, whose bark was much worse than his bite. They doubted he had ever harmed a fly.

“As for those two kids,” the lady who ran the hardware store said, “Lou gets blamed every time someone disappears up there. But people get lost in the Border Range all the time. Those two kids didn’t even have a compass. You can hardly blame Lou for that.”

Somehow the part about folks disappearing all the time didn’t reassure me very much, even if it was their own fault.

As for the crazy hermit, I still didn’t know who to believe. I heard so many stories about old Lou, it was hard to tell what part of the legend was true and what wasn’t. Lou, himself, was now so old that anyone who might have once known the truth of the matter was either dead or had long since forgotten.

All that was known for sure was that old Lou lived up in the mountains and had a very unsuccessful mining claim. In fact, I couldn’t find a single person who had ever bothered to go all the way up to his claim. Folks simply never went up there. This was in part because of all the “No Trespassing” and “Violators will be Shot” signs along the road (if you could call it a road) that led up to his cabin (if you could call it a cabin). But mainly it was because the Border Range was simply too far away and too high up.

Unfortunately for me, Lou’s claim happened to be in the center of the very wilderness I had been hired to study. I was going up there whether I wanted to or not. So, the day after the moth traps arrived, I loaded my backpack, being sure to include my compass, and drove north out of town in an old beat-up Forest Service truck. The gravel road leading to the trailhead was very rough in spots and the old truck shook violently in protest. After passing about twenty miles of clearcuts, I arrived at the end of the official road and the beginning of the Border Range Wilderness. By the time I parked the truck, it was nearly noon. I lifted my huge backpack and started hiking up the trail (which was actually just an old road that had eroded into a deep rut). It occurred to me as I left the truck behind that my journey into the unknown was about to begin. I wondered if Lewis and Clark ever felt this nervous.

The trail ascended almost due North through a large clearcut, going up and over a couple of small hills. The sun was already beating down on this south-facing slope and the heat in the clearcut turned the hiking into a torture test. I felt like I was walking in a giant furnace. Were it not for the stumps around me, it could have been the Sahara Desert. I would have taken my shirt off, but the swarms of bugs surrounding me made that idea completely out of the question. The bugs were so thick that I had to put a bandana over my face to keep from inhaling them. Their constant angry buzzing sound was like they were warning me not to go any further.

Then the trail went straight up an open ravine, a deeply cut canyon with vertical cliffs on both sides of it. This canyon narrowed and increased in steepness as I climbed higher until eventually it was little more than a gully. I knew from the map that it was suppose to level out at some point, but the heat and the bugs made the climbing almost unbearable. The huge load in my backpack – basically a bunch of moth traps – made the climbing even harder.

I was beginning to realize I had seriously underestimated the difficulty of my assignment. I paused under the partial shade of a small tree growing in the gully and pondered my predicament. I recalled that, in addition to the government pay, Doc had offered me five credits – graduate level credits – for turning in a report on my moth study. But after what seemed like hours of climbing up this endless ravine, I began to wonder if it was worth it – even with the five credits.

"Still, I had come this far ..." I told myself. So I kept climbing, surrounded by cliffs and with the hot sun and barren clear cut at my back. The Forest Service truck shrank as I climbed and eventually became little more than a dot at the end of the logging road.

Finally, I reached the top of the ravine and entered a dense patch of huge trees. Amazingly, the temperature dropped twenty degrees practically the moment I entered the shade of this forest. At almost the same time, the bugs disappeared and the slope leveled off in what amounted to a high plateau.

"Thank God!" I muttered as I took off my backpack and removed my bandana bug mask. I sat down next to a tree to eat my lunch. "Hopefully," I thought, "the worst is now behind me."

During lunch, it occurred to me that the old miner and the old trees around me had a lot in common. They had both been protected from the "benefits of modern civilization" by the same things: too high, too steep and too far away.

I also noticed another strange thing. At first I couldn't put my finger on it, but as I sat there for a while it gradually dawned on me ... it was the birds; I could hear several birds gently chirping in the trees. The birds looked down on me with great curiosity. Some flew within a few feet of me to get a better view. They were clearly wondering who I was and what I was doing there. So was I.

I continued to follow the rut, which was more like a real path now, up through the dense forest.

After what seemed like three or four miles, the forest briefly opened up as the path went through a small clearing. I could see that the trail continued on, climbing a broad and gentle ridge on the uphill side of the meadow.

By this point however, I was completely exhausted. The sun shining on the meadow gave it a warm and inviting feeling. The wildflowers, which filled the air with their fragrance, reminded me of the blossoms on the cherry trees back at the University. Almost without thinking, I decided to make this little clearing my camp for the night. I reasoned that the ridge would still be there in the morning. One more day wouldn't make that much difference. I could finish the hike up to Lou's cabin after I had some rest.

I took off my pack and laid out my sleeping bag underneath a large tree that was on one side of the clearing. The sun was still fairly high in the sky, but I decided to take a nap. I could always have dinner later.

* * *

I must have fallen asleep because when I awoke it was pitch black out. Having spent my whole life living in or near towns, I had never seen anything this dark. It was like I was looking with my eyes closed. The darkness was made blacker still by the cold chill of a bitter wind blowing down from a glacier somewhere above me. This powerful wind, which had awoken me, would arrive without warning and build itself up to a frightening force. Then, as suddenly as it started, it would stop; leaving only a quiet, biting cold behind as a reminder of its passing.

But the worst part of the darkness was the fear. This was the first night I had ever spent in an Old Growth Forest. Almost immediately, I realized I was alone in a strange and scary world. I was very much afraid. My anxiety was magnified by the dark forest around me, which would come alive with each passing breeze. The huge ancient trees, which towered above me, ominously creaked and groaned in protest to the stronger gusts. Then their long dark branches would slowly sway in rhythm with the more gentle breezes, as if they were doing some secret mysterious dance that only they understood.

Slowly, over the ridge to the east, the moon began to rise. It was shockingly gigantic. It's grotesque, overbearing size loomed like a huge white eyeball peering down on me. It's cold eerie light only served to further magnify my fear.

Looking around, I could hardly recognize the little meadow I had chosen for a campsite just a few hours earlier. While I was asleep, some sort of strange transformation had taken place.

The clearing had completely lost all of its charm. The warm fragrance of the flowers had been replaced by the ferocity of the bitterly cold wind. The moon shadows of the trees hung over the once innocent meadow, like the teeth of a monster silently waiting to devour me. I was now completely surrounded by a hostile and frightful place.

"Bad decision," I thought as I laid there shaking in my sleeping bag, "I should have kept hiking." But I had been tired and the meadow had seemed so beautiful and peaceful. Now it was more like a sinister trap; and I was the helpless victim who had been lured in by its charms. I now looked on the scene around me with the desperation of an animal snared in a trap from which there was no escape.

Fool that I was I hadn't brought a tent or even a tarp. "It's summertime," I told myself, "It won't rain, and besides I'll be able to see the stars." But the real reason I left my tent behind was because I needed room in my pack for all those stupid moth traps.

I tried to reassure myself by thinking, "It'll be just like camping out in my backyard."

But it wasn't. For openers there were no giant trees in my backyard, nor was there this chilling wind. This was such a wild and unforgiving place. It was a place visited by very few people. It was as different from my backyard as any place could ever be.

"What was I thinking?" my mind now raced with adrenaline, "I must have been crazy. I never should have taken this job. I might get killed out here!"

Even the sounds were different. For some reason my hearing was much better than in town. It was so still around me I could hear each distinct breeze slowly make its way through the trees and then finally pass over me. In between the gusts of wind, it became so quiet I could hear waterfalls nearly a mile away.

I heard other sounds, too. It was those "other sounds" that now worried me the most.

I recalled reading in the hiking guide that, as part of the Dreamer religion, the Nez Perce would come out here to their sacred mountains all alone and spend the night on a "vision quest." Perhaps this was where I got the idea it was safe to be out here alone. If Native Americans could spend the night all alone in the mountains, then surely so could I. But I now realized I was not an Indian. I didn't belong here. What may have been a powerful vision to them was to me more like a terrifying nightmare.

As the trees creaked and the wind swirled, I took a deep breath and tried to calm myself. "Only a hundred years ago," I thought, "that may be a long time to us humans, but it's a very short time in the life of a forest. It was quite probable that little about this forest had changed since the time of the Dreamers." But it was no use. My imagination had taken over. The trees had become "wooden people" who were out to get their revenge. Perhaps there were still savage Indians lurking about in this forest.

Now, in addition to fearing the trees and the wind and the moon, I was afraid one of the Dreamers was going to sneak up on me and slit my throat!

Just then the dark stillness of the night was again broken by those strange sounds. It sounded as if a large animal was moving through the forest not far away from me. I could almost hear it breathing. Sinking deep into my sleeping bag I prayed, "God, I hope it's not that crazy hermit."

I listened carefully. It didn't sound like a person. It had a deeper, wilder sound ... like a bear!

Sinking even deeper in to my sleeping bag, I changed my prayer: "God, I hope it's not a bear!" I had read that bears don't really eat people and that, statistically, one was much safer in the mountains than in town. Somehow, knowing all that didn't seem to reassure me. The fear inside of me continued to grow. I tried hard to go to sleep, but I kept hearing those strange sounds.

All I could think about were bears ... hungry bears ... large hungry bears.

My heart was now pounding so hard there was no way I could fall asleep. Dinner was likewise out of the question.

As the night progressed, it got much colder. In order to stay warm, I pulled the hood of my sleeping bag closed, until just my face was poking out ... but I was still very cold. Eventually the rustling noises stopped. Whatever it was had gone away. My worries about bears were now replaced by worries about freezing to death. As I laid there shivering, I recalled thinking I would be glad to see the sun again.

As I cowered in my sleeping bag, the wind continued it's dance with the big trees not far above me. They seemed to be talking to each other.

"He has finally arrived," the wind would say.

But the trees would shake their branches in protest as if to say, "No, this poor frightened thing cannot possibly be the one we were waiting for."

Shaking in my sleeping bag, the debate continued. The longer I listened, the more I seemed to understand. The wind talked of White Bird's prophesy and the power of a name. The trees turned into wooden people. They protested that fear and ignorance were too great an obstacle to overcome. The wind replied that he was older than the trees. The trees laughed at this remark and noted that time was older than the wind.

The wind conceded, "You are right my friend. Only time will tell if this is the one... Only time will tell..."

I awoke from the deep confusion of this long dream about wind and wooden people to the dark stillness of the night. It took me a while to realize where I was at. My eyes were still half-closed, but I sensed that dawn must be approaching. I wasn't really asleep, but I wasn't quite awake yet either. Even so, I had this strange feeling there was something very different about that morning. The cold wind of the night before had thankfully disappeared.

Then I heard a sound nearby. But I was still very tired from the ordeal of the long cold night and the difficult hike the day before. So, whatever it was, I tried hard to ignore it and go back to sleep.

Then, I heard it again. The quiet of the night was broken by the gentle chirping of a single small meadowlark.

I wondered, "Why was that bird singing?" I know it sounds strange, but I felt like that bird was trying to explain something. I listened a little more. Even in my slumber I could tell it was a song of anticipation, as if the bird was saying, "Wake up everyone. Something important is about to happen."

As I tried hard to go back to sleep, the brave little bird came closer to me and sang his song even louder, with a stern, almost scolding tone. He seemed to be chirping directly at me, as if he were saying, "You there! You in that sleeping bag! You need to wake up most of all!"

As my eyes slowly came open, a second bird joined in the chirping chorus. Soon, many other birds, birds of all kinds, added their own unique songs. Together they created a harmony and soon the whole meadow and forest around me came alive with their music. Within minutes, the silence of the night had been replaced by an entire mountain range of singing birds.

"Why?" I wondered, "Why are all these birds singing?"

As their song filled the forest, the answer appeared on the horizon.

It was the sunrise! These birds were singing a song of greeting to the sun! As those first bright rays of sunshine came up over the ridge and landed in the small meadow, I shared in the happiness of their song. Then, while the sun warmed my sleeping bag, I began to understand their feeling of appreciation. For the first time in my life, I realized how important the sunrise was, not only to the birds, but also to me. This was the lesson the little bird had awakened me to see.

As I sat up listening to all the birds still singing around me, I wondered, "What else could I learn from these little birds?" Looking around, I slowly began to see this forest itself in a new and completely different way.

At first glance I had seen only a few birds, but the longer and more closely I looked, the more varieties of birds came into view. Little brown wrens and juncos hopped about under the trees. On the branches higher up were gray jays and woodpeckers. Partially hidden in the meadow before me were the familiar ducks and geese. Hummingbirds hovered over wildflowers as thrushes and robins circled overhead.

I thought about the phrase, "Seeing the forest from the trees." I'd heard that phrase lots of times before, but up until that moment, I hadn't really known what it meant. Now I did. As I watched those birds and listened to the music of all the wildlife surrounding me, it became obvious that a forest is much more than its trees. The forest is a home - a home filled with life - and these creatures, that we call "wildlife," love their home so much that they sing a song of appreciation every morning at the rising of the sun. This was a lesson that could not be seen in any picture of a forest. Nor could it be learned from any book. It is a song that must be heard, not only with your ears, but also with your heart. I wish I could describe it for you, but perhaps it is best I cannot; because instead, you may then have the desire to go experience this wonderful feeling for yourself. The birds had made it clear how foolish I'd been the night before. The forest was not a place to be feared. Rather, it was a place to be loved.

As I sat there with a new appreciation for this living forest that surrounded me, I thought back over the events of the past few weeks. What exactly was it that had led me to this majestic spot in the first place? Why was I here?

Gradually it all came back to me. My first thought was, "I had come up here to see the old miner." But as I thought about it a little more, I remembered the Gypsy Moths. "That's it," I told myself, "I'm here because of those Gypsy Moths."

As I continued to think about it however, it finally dawned on me why I was really here. "No," I thought, "It wasn't the miner or the Gypsy Moths. It was because of that girl ... that girl who cared too much. It was that girl and her story about the starfish. That's why I was really here."

I realized I had been asleep my whole life. I was finally waking up. I was beginning to understand why she cared so much and what her starfish story really meant. It was all there in the sunrise song of the birds. It was a song about caring and about listening with your heart. That was what I learned during my first sunrise in Old Growth. It was a morning I hoped never to forget.

* * *

As I began my second day of climbing, I felt like a completely different person. Even the climbing itself felt different. Going uphill was no longer a struggle to be endured, but a joy to be experienced. As I ascended the ridge above the meadow, I could feel the surge of happiness rising inside of me.

My whole life up until that morning now seemed like a meaningless blur. In town and back at school, all the days, weeks and months had gone by so rapidly. But out here time seemed to slow down. Every moment was a new experience.

The trail gradually rose as it headed for the heart of the Border Range. As I rose with it, the view became ever more impressive. It was pure magic. Could it be that this was only my second day out here? Time no longer seemed relevant. I was now in the high alpine country and that was all that mattered.

The trail eventually rounded a corner on the ridge and my daydreaming was brought to an abrupt halt by an old, poorly written sign which read: **"Do Not Enter – Trespassers Shot Without Warning."**

I didn't know what to do. No one back at college ever mentioned that biology could be this dangerous. I nervously took a few steps forward.

The path seemed to narrow as it went directly through a gap between two huge rocks. There was no other way. I stopped and listened, but all I could hear was the gentle sound of a waterfall somewhere above me.

As I made my way between the two large rocks, I suddenly saw him. "At least," I thought "it had to be him. Who else would be crazy enough to come up here?"

He was standing above me on the ridge crest. With the sun at his back, I had to squint just to look up at him. While I couldn't see him very well, the shadow formed by his outline made it clear that he had a shot gun pointing right at me.

I tried to act as friendly as possible. I shouted out the only thing I could think of ... "Howdy, Lou!" But even I could hear the fear in my voice.

His booming reply came back, "Can't you read?"

I didn't know quite what to say. It was obvious if he found out I worked for the Government, he might just shoot me on the spot. So I tried a different approach ...

"Read what?" I asked as innocently as possible.

"Those signs, you fool! ... Only a fool would keep walking past those signs."

"Ah, I've come up here to talk with you," I stammered.

"Well, I ain't talkin' to no fool ... You've got just ten seconds to get out of my sight! Now GET!"

"Please," I begged. I was suddenly near tears. "I've spent hours climbing this hill and I'm supposed to study the moths up here. If I go back empty-handed, I'll probably lose my job. Please, can't I just ... "

"Lose your job?" he muttered. "Study moths? What the hell kind of job you got, kid?"

"Please, don't shoot me, Lou!" I blurted out, "I work for the Government and I'm here to study the moths."

"Don't you flatlanders got enough moths to study down in the valley?"

"We do, but they aren't the right kind. The ones up here are ... uh, different and I'm supposed to find out why. Please, can't I just ... "

I must have said something funny because Lou's frown turned to a smile. I could hear him chuckling to himself about something ...

"Moths!" he laughed, "They came for my moths! If that ain't the craziest thing I ever heard!"

Then he resumed his frown. As his focus turned back to me, he snapped, "Kid, if you're lying, I'll blow your eyes out faster 'n you can spit ... "

"Honest, Lou ... I swear on a stack of Bibles a mile high it's the truth!"

"Okay kid. I guess I gotta believe you. No one could make up a story that stupid. You can have your moths. I wouldn't want you to lose your job. Just one thing ... don't take another step forward."

It was too late, because I already had ... and that was the last thing I remember.

But I imagine that, after I disappeared into that hole, old Lou turned to his mule and said, "You heard me, Buck ... I warned him not to do that."



"OK, kid, I guess I gotta believe you. No one could make up a story that stupid."

Chapter Three ... Ghosts

*How deep our sleep last night in the mountain's heart,
Beneath the trees and stars, hushed by solemn sounding waterfalls
And many small soothing voices in sweet accord whispering peace!*
John Muir, My First Summer in the Sierra

As near as I can remember, I was climbing a hill. The faint path I was on paralleled a small stream up through a series of waterfalls.

A voice whispered, "Follow the stream. Follow your dream."

Eventually I crested the hill and reached an open but rocky plateau. I continued to follow the stream up the now more gradual slope until I finally came upon a deep pool of clear water. This bubbling spring was evidently the source of the stream. Surrounding this circular pool were several small trees.

I got down on my knees and washed my face in the cool, refreshing water. As I cleared my eyes, I was startled to see a young girl standing right where one of the small trees had been. She had long dark hair and very dark eyes. She was trying hard to hide a smile as if she thought something was very funny.

She pointed at the pool and began to talk very slowly as if explaining something to a small child.

"This is the Spring of Life... It is the beginning of all things... It is the meaning of your name... Look and you will see."

Slowly it dawned on me that I was at a sacred place. I began to see the connection between the small trees and the circular pool. The trees were there because the pool was there. They could not survive without it. Then I realized that I could not survive without this sacred pool. I saw that all life - including my own life - flowed from this single source. As the stream flowed out of it, the pool fed not only the stream but also every tree, flower, bird and every other living creature. Through the flow of water, everything was connected to this spring. As a biology student, I had been taught that all life depended on water. Now I could see how true this was.

I sat there for a long time and watched the water flow endlessly out of the spring. The water had a shining quality. It glowed more brightly the longer I watched it. Soon this white glow covered everything and was everything. The brightness became so intense that I could no longer look at it.

Closing my eyes, I heard the girl say once more, "Remember, David. The Spring of Life. The beginning of all things. That is the power of your name."

Gradually I opened my eyes to a very bright light. It was the sun shining through a window. I closed my eyes again and tried to remember the beautiful dream. Follow the stream. Follow your dream.

I eventually regained consciousness in a dark musty room, which seemed to be slowly spinning around me. The first thing I noticed was my pounding headache, as if I had been hit over the head with a baseball bat. The second thing I noticed was that smell, like I was near someone who hadn't taken a shower in a year - maybe more. Next, I heard a groaning sound. It was coming from me. Then another voice which said, "Well, you're finally coming around. I was beginning to think you weren't gonna make it. You've been out for hours."

I stopped groaning ... because it hurt too much. It was all coming back now:- that big pit, the rope around my feet, my head hitting something hard.

After a while, I managed to say, "That was some kind of bear trap!"

Lou laughed, "Bear trap! Hell! That weren't no bear trap. No bear I know would be dumb enough to fall into a hole like that!"

I thought, "It sure seemed like a bear trap." That started me wondering, "If it wasn't meant for a bear, then who was it for?"

The process of thinking must have been too hard, however, as again I passed out. The next thing I remembered was a bright light shining in my face. It was the sun once more coming through the window. It had been up for a while since the room was now very warm.

Again I tried to remember the dream. But instead all I could think of was a more immediate concern. I was extremely hungry.

I sat up to get a better look at my surroundings. There were no mirrors, no sinks and no glass in the window; just a bunch of gray army blankets on top of an old metal storage locker, against one wall, and an old wood stove in the center of a small rustic room. Lou must have left while I was passed out because I was now quite alone.

I felt my head and realized it had been bandaged. I tried to stand up and nearly fainted, so I sat back down. Then, I stood up more slowly and made my way to the storage locker near the far corner of the room. The door creaked as I pulled it open. I was surprised to find that Lou's food locker was completely filled with Graham Crackers ... dozens of boxes of Graham Crackers. They were the same kind my school nurse used to give me when I had an upset stomach back in grade school.

"Well," I thought, "my stomach is sure upset now." So I pulled out a box and started eating.

I was half done with the box when Lou came through the door and offered, "I see you found the food supply!"

With my mouth still full, I apologized, "I hope you don't mind. I was really hungry and ... "

"Not at all, kid, help yourself. I hope you like 'em"

"Thanks! They're very good. I just... "

"By the way," he interrupted. "I never did get your name yesterday."

"I'm sorry," I mumbled, half-choking on the crackers, "my name is David Spring and yours is Lou.. "

"Yeah," he replied. "Lou Muir." Lou looked a lot like another Muir I had read about in school. Lou was a big thin man with a short gray beard and he wore an old gray Filson hat, even indoors.

I asked him, "Are you related to John Muir?"

"Not really." Lou smiled, "My dad didn't believe in last names, but the flatlanders insisted on something for their legal papers. Dad picked Muir because he read John Muir's books and figured Muir was the only one of them flatlanders that had any brains at all." Then he added, "I still got most of those books. That's how I learned to read."

Then Lou abruptly changed the subject. "Well, Mr. Spring, what's all this you were saying about wanting my moths?"

Realizing the seriousness in his voice, I set the Graham Crackers aside. Then I explained that I was a biology student on a summer job for the Forest Service, and that they wanted me to study the forest around his claim. I told him about the previous years study and how the Border Range appeared to be the only forest in the region not affected by the invasion of gypsy moths.

"Son," he interrupted. "I'm afraid you were misinformed. I got all kinds of moths up here."

"I know," I continued, "but none of the moths up here are killing the trees, and my job is to find out why."

"And just how are you going to do that?" he asked.

"Well, I don't really know; but for starters I'm supposed to collect samples of the local moth population along with some of the bark from the local trees and send it all back to the lab at the State University."

"How you gonna catch these moths, kid?"

"I brought some moth traps up with me. At least I used to have ... "

"You mean them little boxes there by the door?" he pointed. "I was wonderin' why you brought a bunch of cardboard boxes up here. I thought maybe you were gonna use 'em to start a fire or somethin'."

"Actually, they're specially scented traps. I should have all the moths I need in just a day or two."

"Well, that's good kid," Lou said sternly as he gazed out the cabin's only window, "because I want you out of here just as fast as possible."

After Lou had gone back outside, I peeked out the window and saw for the first time what Lou had been looking at. There, laid out before me, were the most beautiful snow-capped mountains extending as far as my eyes could see!

Lou's cabin was in a small meadow near the edge of a large glacier at the junction between timberline and snowline. From the base of the glacier came a small stream that flowed right in front of the cabin. Just above and all around the cabin were giant majestic mountains, each with a different shape, but all covered with snow ... which magically seemed to glisten and shimmer in the reflection of the summer sun. I had seen snow-covered peaks before, but none that sparkled as brightly as these.

Later that afternoon, I commented to Lou about the shimmering lights. He replied it was probably the altitude playing tricks on my eyes.

Recalling a discussion from my meteorology class back at school, I asked, "You mean like how ice crystals and water vapor could deflect sunlight in strange ways?"

"Yeah," Lou said blankly, "that must be it."

The hardest part about collecting moths was putting the traps up in the trees. Down in the lowlands, ladders were always used to place the traps; but I obviously had not packed a ladder up here, and Lou didn't have one. I naively suggested making one out of some twine and branches but Lou scowled, "Hell, kid, you've spent too much time in town. Just give me those damned boxes and tell me where you want 'em!"

We proceeded to place traps and collect bark samples for the rest of the day, with me pointing and Lou climbing the trees. For an old man, he was surprisingly agile and not at all afraid of heights.

That evening Lou cooked up a soup. I was initially somewhat reluctant to try his strange looking concoction, in part because I had no idea what was in it. But it smelled okay and actually turned out to be quite delicious. Either that or I was still suffering from hunger, or delirium, or perhaps both!

I was starting to admire Lou. Maybe I just appreciated his help. But I think it was more that I respected his self-confidence ... that fierce look in his eyes whenever he looked out over "his" mountains, and that determined tone in his voice whenever he talked about anything.

After dinner, in the reflection of the fire from the open wood stove, I also saw another side of him. The warm, yellow light revealed the wrinkled lines of his face ... and the tiredness in his eyes as he gazed back at the small fire. He seemed troubled, not so much by my presence, but more by some much larger matter.

"You know," he was saying, "I still can't figure out why you want to study moths."

"It's my job," I told him.

"Job!" he scoffed. "Now that's a city word for you! Life should be more than just 'having a job!'"

"I agree," I continued, "but this is more than just a job. You see, we're running out of Old Growth forests. There may be plenty of big healthy trees up here, but all over the country the forests are dying. And it's not just the forests, but all of the plants and animals that live in those forests. Whole 'eco-systems' are on the verge of collapse.

All because of this gypsy moth invasion. So, if I can help find some answers, I might be able to save not only the trees but also the wildlife that depend upon the forest for their home."

"Moths my foot!" Lou interrupted, "I'll tell you what the real problem is ... and it ain't no gypsy moths. It's those damned flatlanders. All they ever think about is money. They just can't see that money is nothin' but a bunch of green paper and yellow rocks. They look at a tree and what do they see? Do they see a squirrel's home or a bird's home? Hell no! All they see is money. Why, I heard these days a single big tree can bring in over a thousand dollars. So of course they're gonna chop it down. That's what's killin' the forest, kid. It ain't no gypsy moths. It's you're pals with the chain saws."

Lou shook his head and continued, "I've been watching it for years. They cut down damn near every tree between here and Salmon Falls. 'Clear cuts' they call them. As far as the eye can see, not a single tree left in sight. Hell, they would have chopped down the trees up here too if they could've figured out a way to get 'em down the cliffs and all. That's why these trees are still standing, kid. It isn't the moths, it's the cliffs that are protecting these trees."

"In a way, you're right, Lou," I interjected, "but it's not just the cliffs because there are other Old Growth forests that are surrounded by cliffs and they are being attacked by gypsy moths. If we can't figure out how to stop those moths, then the Forest Service will be forced to turn the trees over to the loggers, who will use helicopters to haul them out. The Forest Service figures it's better to give the trees to loggers than to simply lose them to gypsy moths."

"Forest Service, Hell!" Lou snapped back. "Say it more slowly and you'll discover what that term really means – Forced To Serve Vice – that's what they're really all about".

"Fools!" Lou stood up and threw his arms in the air as he stomped toward the window, "nothin' but damned fools. That's what happens when you spend too much time livin' in the city. Your damned brain shuts off! Any idiot knows if you chop off a person's leg, the whole person could die. But they go to a forest, and chop off both of its legs and both of its arms and then they wonder why it gets a little sickly lookin'. Ain't no wonder why the forests are dyin'. Those damn flatlanders are killin' 'em."

"You may be right," I tried to calm him down, "but that doesn't explain why this Old Growth Forest is still healthy. It too is surrounded by clear cuts. It has had its arms and legs chopped off as you put it. Yet the trees here have somehow escaped the bad moth invasion. So there's got to be something different about it, and maybe I can find out what that difference is."

"Kid, let me tell you somethin'. Even if you got rid of every moth in the forest, it wouldn't make a damned bit of difference, cause a flatlander can take down a tree a hell of a lot faster than any moth ever could. Kid, I tell you it's the flatlanders ... they're the real gypsy moths and they ain't gonna change until they figure out there's something more important in this world than green paper and yellow rocks!"

Still looking out the window and almost ignoring me, Lou lowered his voice and muttered mostly to himself, "You want to study something, go back to Salmon Falls and study those flatlanders. Maybe you could figure out why they're all such a bunch of damned fools."

Then he turned to me and asked, "What do you think would happen to this place if those flatlanders ever thought there was gold up here?"

Lou didn't wait for my reply, "I'll tell you what would happen, they'd level the place. All just to get some yellow rocks. I've heard where they've blown up whole mountains ... gone. Do you think it would matter to them if that mountain was home to some birds or something. Why, they wouldn't stop long 'nough to spit."

After a while, Lou came back to his seat by the wood stove and stared into the fire ... as if he were trying hard to figure something out. Finally he asked, "The gypsy moths eat the trees?" I nodded. Then he asked, "Well, who eats the gypsy moths?"

I replied, "Bats and birds I suppose, except that bats and birds are becoming endangered species, too."

"No wonder." He scowled, still looking at the fire.

We both sat there silently gazing at the small fire for several minutes.

Then Lou said, "You know, you're the first person that's ever set foot in this cabin besides my father and mother and me."

"Really?" I smiled. "You mean no one else has ever come up that trail?" (I was now feeling rather proud of my accomplishment.)

"Oh, they came up it all right," Lou smiled back, "but we shot 'em all!" Lou was now grinning from ear to ear.

I tried to smile too, but I wasn't sure if he was joking or if he was serious. I decided instead to change the subject to something a little less scary.

"It's gotta be rough," I said, "living up here without any running water."

"What do you mean?" Lou protested, "There's water running right out there in that creek!"

I wasn't making much headway, so I tried yet a different topic. "Where are your father and mother now?"

"Oh, they both passed on years ago," he sighed, his smile now gone.

"Isn't it lonely being up here all by yourself?" I said, more commenting to myself than to Lou as I looked about his stark cabin.

"Not at all," he replied. "Not lonely at all."

After a pause, he added, "The only time I ever feel lonely is when I go down to Salmon Falls."

"Town," he said with disdain, "now there's a lonely place for you!"

I was still trying to figure out that comment when he added, "Besides, who says I'm alone up here?"

"What do you mean by that, Lou?" (I was almost afraid to ask.)

"Ghosts." he smiled, "There's always the ghosts!"

Just then a piece of wood in the stove "popped!" ... and I jumped up spilling the rest of my soup on the cabin floor.

"Sorry," I stammered, still frightened.

As I looked around for a rag to clean up the mess, Lou replied blankly, "Leave it, kid. You worry too much. This ain't no hotel."

He then stood up and walked to the window. Looking out at a rising moon, he added, "Besides, it's time to hit the sack. The fire in the stove is almost out and it's gonna get real cold, real quick."

I had wanted to ask Lou about his past and about his mother. I was about to ask him if she was really a Native American, but after Lou's comment about the ghosts, I was now far too scared to say anything.

Then, just before Lou blew out the candle that was the cabin's last light, he looked straight at me, as if he had read my mind, and said, "Son, it doesn't really matter where we come from. What matters is where we're going."

His matter-of-fact statement left me even more frightened than before.

As I laid in the dark under the stack of blankets Lou had given me, I wondered, "How did he know what I was thinking? ... and what did he mean by "what matters is where we're going?"

I thought about how afraid I had been to spend a night out in this forest. But Lou seemed to view it as his home. To Lou, it was town that was a strange and foreign place. It seemed like everything he believed was the opposite of everything I had ever been taught.

How was it that Lou seemed to understand so much? He seemed so wise, so connected to the natural world around him. I wondered who Lou's teacher had been. Did his mother instill in him the wisdom of the Dreamer Indians, or was his teacher Mother Earth itself?

Then I started thinking about ghosts. . .ghosts from Lou's past. . .his father and mother. Suddenly, I realized that I too had ghosts. My ghosts were the settlers who had stolen the sacred mountains from the Native Americans. Perhaps I was just feeling guilty about the role my ancestors had played in robbing the Indians of their homeland. But I had this curious feeling – like this was a story that was not yet over.

There was a lot I didn't understand about Native Americans. I had read that these Indians looked at the world in a completely different way; they believed that land was sacred and therefore could not be bought or sold. I recalled again the description in the guidebook ... about how these mountains were regarded as especially sacred places where the Native Americans would come to when they were on a "vision-quest."

I wondered, "What did those Dreamers know that I did not know? What did they see that I could not see?"

Then there were my own dreams about the wind and the wooden people and the girl and the spring of life. I was afraid to fall asleep for fear of the dreams that might come next.

Outside the small cabin, a brisk wind began to blow.

In my fear, I could hear my own heart pounding. My heart sounded like the drum beat of an Indian Ghost dance ... "Why?" I wondered, "Why was I so afraid out here? Were there really ghosts? ... or was it something else?"

It took a long time to fall asleep. I kept thinking of ghosts and the wind talking to the wooden people. Late into the night, and even in my dreams, I heard the Dreamer Indians doing a Ghost Dance in the moonlight outside the cabin window.

As the drum beat suddenly grew louder, I awoke with beads of sweat pouring down my face. Outside, the drum beat mingled with the sound of the wind and the stream. Then I heard talking and laughing and a strange kind of rhythmic chanting, almost like a song. It sounded like Lou ... but he wasn't alone.

Who was he talking to?

Was I still dreaming?

Looking toward the window, I saw vague lights and shadows, like ghosts glowing and shimmering in the light of a rising full moon. As I watched the reflection of those eerie shadows weaving and jumping on the cabin wall, I reached a startling conclusion. Lou was out there in the moonlight ... and, just as I had dreamed, he was dancing with ghosts.

Chapter Four ... Flatlanders

*He had the feeling that the answer was quite different
And that he ought to know it, but he could not think of it.*

The Hobbit

The next morning, I was again woken by the sun shining through the open window. I realized now that this was no accident. Lou had evidently planned for this window to face the rising sun. Like the morning before, I was alone ... and hungry. Feeling only slightly guilty this time, I headed toward the metal locker containing the graham crackers. Finding the open box I had started on yesterday, I proceeded to finish it off.

Then I decided to go outside to look for Lou (or at least to look around). As I approached the cabin door, it suddenly flew open ... and there was Lou!

My heart was again pounding from the surprise. Lou asked, "What's the matter, kid? You look like you've just seen a ghost!"

"Sorry, Lou, I was about to go out and look for you."

"That wouldn't have been a good idea, son - or have you forgotten about those 'bear' traps?"

I shuttered at the thought of accidentally falling into another one of those holes, "I guess I'm still not thinking clearly."

"That's all right kid" Lou said reassuringly. "I understand. That's what too much city livin' will do to your brain." I had been referring more to the concussion I had suffered just a couple of days earlier. Lou obviously was relating my oversight to a more long-term kind of brain damage.

"Anyway, I got your moth traps down. Damned near every one of them had a moth of one color or another in it. I guess city folks at least know how to make a good moth trap!"

"Wow, Lou, that's great! I sure appreciate your help. I don't know how I could ever repay you."

"Well, I do," he said briskly, "You can take your moths and get the hell out of here."

Lou may not have been trained in the social graces, but I had learned to understand him and had even grown to like him.

"Sure, Lou ... be happy to. I'm as good as gone. But listen, ah, do you think you could guide me down for a ways. I mean, at least 'til I'm past those bear traps?"

Lou smiled and softened up a bit when he saw I was genuinely concerned. He offered, "I'll do better than that kid. I'll give you and your moths a ride down the hill on my mule."

So down the hill we went. What had taken hours to walk up seemed to take only minutes to go back down. In no time at all, we descended the ridge, passed the small meadow and made our way through the dense forest.

When we reached the top of the steep ravine, Lou suddenly stopped and said blankly, "This is where you get off."

I could tell from the icy stare in his eyes that Lou was angry about something. He seemed to be looking straight through me. As I dismounted the mule, I turned around to see what he was glaring at. It was the clearcut. The lush green forest behind us contrasted sharply with the vast brown wasteland in front of and below us. Clear to the horizon, there was hardly a single tree left standing.

Lou looked out over the destruction with disgust. I knew what he was thinking ... gypsy moths didn't cause that devastation. Lou didn't say a word. It was obvious I would be going down the ravine without his assistance.

Trying to make the best of our parting, I told him that he lived in a very beautiful place and that maybe I would come back up there and visit him sometime.

Lou, however, wasn't quite as sentimental. As he turned back toward the Old Growth forest with his mule in hand, I remember hearing him say, "Kid ... don't push your luck."

After watching Lou slowly make his way back up the path and disappear into the dense stand of trees, I turned around and gazed out at the enormity of the clear-cut in front of me. All that remained of a once-living forest was an endless sea of stumps. As I descended the ravine in the hot, open sun and made my way to the Forest Service truck, I noticed the change. There was a deadly silence in the air. No birds sang here. They were all gone now. Their home had been destroyed.

All that remained was the angry buzzing of a million flies. I was once again forced to put on my bandana just to breath.

I began to see the clear-cut through Lou's eyes. I wondered "What kind of madness could have driven us to such extreme destruction? How could we have traded the paradise we once lived in for green paper and yellow rocks?

I remember feeling that Lou was going in the right direction, back to the mountains, and I was going the wrong way, back to Salmon Falls. I was sad. I had lost a beautiful paradise before I even realized what I had found. I would have been sadder still had I known that would be the last I would see of my new and dear friend Lou.

* * *

Driving back to town, I tried to reassure myself that it was natural the clear-cuts should seem a lot worse now than they had on the drive out. I told myself it was only the contrast I was feeling. After all, I had just spent the better part of three days among the giant trees, so of course it would take some adjustment to get used to the stick forests and artificial tree farms that passed for wilderness down in the low lands.

Still, I found myself thinking that maybe Lou was right. Maybe I was studying the wrong thing. Maybe the gypsy moths weren't the real threat to the Ancient Forests. Maybe it was the flatlanders after all.

Then I thought, "Boy, you've been away too long - you must have been hit on the head harder than you thought. You're even beginning to sound like that old hermit." I reminded myself about my project and how important it was. There was something different about that forest ... and perhaps my samples would help me figure out what it was. I glanced at the boxes on the seat beside me. I had accomplished the first step on my mission. A smile slowly returned to my face.

Back at the Salmon Falls Ranger Station, I was greeted with some not-so-unexpected sarcasm - mostly stuff like "The Mountain Man is back ... did you find any moths out there?" and "Smell that guy. Boy, do you need a shower" and "Did you run into that old miner up there? We were beginning to think maybe he shot you!"

They were right about one thing, I did need a shower.

Over the following weeks, I prepared my samples and sent them off to the University to be tested and analyzed. I poured over books Hazelwood had sent me in the mail on butterflies and moths. I studied their life cycles, their reproduction cycles and their food sources.

I read all the available research reports on gypsy moths in particular. I came to understand how they were different from other moths. It seemed that while most moths traveled individually and ate the dead leaves on and around the trees, gypsy moths traveled in giant hoards and ate the whole tree: branches, bark and all. Once the tree was gone, the gypsy moths simply moved on to the next tree. They therefore left a path of destruction in their wake wherever they went.

All of this was well known, but it still didn't explain why there were no gypsy moths in the Border Range Wilderness.

So I broadened my reading to include studies on forest health and bug invasions in general. One study related the problem of forest health and bug infestation to the plight of Endangered Species. It seems that when trees in a forest are cut down, or clear-cut, all of the animals that lived in or around those trees in effect become homeless. This is because those animals had depended on the trees for food and shelter in complex ways that we are just now beginning to understand. One might think that those animals could just go to other trees in other nearby forests ... and many did. But, as the forests continued to be destroyed, the displaced animals got crowded onto smaller and smaller islands.

The author of the study pointed out that over 90 percent of the original virgin forest has already been cut down. Much of the endangered wildlife that is left is now crowded into the last 10 percent of what we call Old Growth forest (see maps). If we cut that down, they will have no place else to go. The study concluded that the reason the bug population was exploding was because the wildlife that used to keep the bugs in check including birds, such as pileated woodpeckers, marbled murrelets and spotted owls were on the verge of extinction due to the loss of their homes.



Virgin Forest, 1850

Virgin Forest, 1990

I had known that fewer trees meant less wildlife because wildlife depended on the trees for homes. What this study implied was that less wildlife also meant fewer trees, because the trees depend on wildlife such as birds to protect them from bugs. The study ended by pointing out that the bug problem was an example of the First Law of Ecology; namely that "Everything is Connected to Everything Else."

Another study blamed the whole bug infestation problem on pesticides. It seems that for the past 30 years the Forest Service had been routinely spraying forests with poisonous chemicals in an effort to keep a variety of bugs in check. The pesticides worked at first, but over time the harmful bugs became resistant to the poisons. They developed resistance because their huge numbers and rapid breeding allowed them to adapt to the poisons.

The Forest Service, instead of learning from this that pesticides were not a good solution, simply responded to the bug adaptation by increasing both the amount of poison used and the frequency of the spraying.

Unfortunately, all this did was accelerate the bug population's evolution into "super-bugs." These new strains of bugs were actually immune to the poisons and, in fact, would eat the poison as a kind of food!

Even worse, the poisons main effect was to wipe out birds and other small animals that fed on the problem bugs. Evidently, as the poisons rose through the food chain, (whenever birds would eat bugs), the poisons became more concentrated.

Pesticides were therefore much more toxic to the predators (the birds) than they had been to the prey (the bugs). These predators were Nature's way of keeping the bad bugs in check. Once the birds were wiped out, the bug populations, including gypsy moths, simply exploded.

This scientist also noted that so much pesticide is currently being used that almost all the public water supplies in the U.S. have become contaminated with traces of these poisons. He referred to a study by the Environmental Protection Agency which found that almost every American now has measurable levels of these poisons inside of us! He even went so far as to suggest that these poisons now inside of us might be one reason why the rate of cancer deaths has been increasing in humans. He pointed out that, biologically at least, we are much more like birds than like bugs.

One curious study went to great lengths analyzing the role that spiders played in protecting the forests. The researcher pointed out that spiders ate almost half of all the moths in the forest, but that many spiders were going extinct because they were more susceptible to pesticides than were other kinds of bugs. Spider populations also appeared to be severely impacted by clear-cutting in ways that we do not yet understand. He guessed that the spiders needed the protection of the large old trees in order to make their complex intricately woven webs. What I found interesting about this study was how such a small thing as a spider could have such a huge impact on an entire forest.

Another study discussed the disappearance of many kinds of bats. Bats will eat several times their own weight in bugs every night, but many bats can only live in the original forests. Evidently, bats need the stable temperatures found in the Old Growth Forests in order to survive. This researcher theorized that the reason Gypsy Moths were now destroying the forests is because many of the bats which protected the forests had been inadvertently wiped out as the forests were being clear-cut.

Still other scientists blamed the problem on "monocultures" within the current tree population. They pointed out that, while the original Old Growth forests had many different kinds of trees, our modern "tree farms" have typically only one or two kinds of trees. This is because the Forest Service, after they cut down all of the originally different trees, had replaced them with trees that were all of one kind. The Forest Service had mistakenly thought the new trees would grow faster and therefore yield more wood. While the new single kind of tree did grow faster, it was much more susceptible to bug infestation. Also it turns out that since different animals depended on many different kinds of trees for their survival, fewer kinds of trees meant fewer kinds of animals in the forest. While the original forests had many kinds of trees and animals, our modern tree farms have only a few. Biologists have long known that this lack of "biodiversity" weakened a forest's defenses and made it more vulnerable to bug attacks. Tree farms may look like a forest, but they don't work like a forest. Sadly, this fact was not considered by the Forest Service in their planting programs.

What was even more amazing about the Forest Service planting program was that not only did they tend to plant just one type of tree in their tree farms, but almost always the trees they planted were genetically related, like brothers and sisters.

Even worse, quite often the trees being planted were genetically identical, being just clones or copies of a single tree. This lack of "genetic diversity" created an extremely weak forest which was easily attacked by gypsy moths.

The gypsy moth invasions would then migrate from tree farm "incubators" to the Old Growth Forests near by. This was called the "incubator theory" by a scientist who noted that the gypsy moth invasions almost always started on Tree Farms.

One scientist believed that the gypsy moth invasion was only a symptom of a deeper more basic problem which was our failure to understand the impact that clear-cutting was having on our environment. We simply did not understand either the complexity or the true value of the forest we were destroying. His study showed that, while trees in our modern tree farms might grow back in twenty to fifty years, it may take a million years or more for the genetic and biological diversity of an Old Growth forest to return! In human terms, this means that once we cut an Old Growth forest down, it is gone to us and to future generations ... essentially forever!

He explained that it was a classic case of not being able to see the forest from its trees. The Forest Service and the private logging companies had assumed that, because the trees grew back, the forest also grew back. This is why they use the term "renewable resource." It is only now that we are beginning to understand that their assumption was wrong. He explained that a forest is much more than its trees. While some of the trees grew back, the other things that make up an Old Growth forest, such as the diversity of its plants and animals, did not. This, he felt, was the basic cause of the gypsy moth invasions.

Another study called in to question the whole concept of tree farms, which is based upon the premise that we could grow trees as if they were a crop of corn. This researcher pointed out that the notion that trees can be "farmed" completely overlooks a rather obvious difference between trees and corn: trees have a growing season that is at least three hundred times longer than corn! While it might be possible to protect corn for its four month growing season, it is simply not possible to protect trees from bugs for one hundred years or more. Without biological and genetic diversity to protect the trees, bug infestations were not only probable, they were inevitable!

While claiming that they were acting responsibly, timber companies were instead simply engaged in a massive decades long "feeding frenzy," devouring the forests without the slightest regard for the destruction they were leaving in their wake or the long term consequences of their actions.

This researcher contended that the Forest Service and the timber industry have known since the 1950's that tree farms don't work. They are simply not sustainable over time. So why, he asked, are they still clearcutting our precious forests and converting them into giant tree farms? Why are they still deceiving the public with this myth that the forests are a renewable resource?

For the answer, he compared the timber industry to the tobacco industry. We now know that, since the 1950's, the tobacco industry has deliberately deceived the public about the safety of their product. Tobacco companies are only now starting to admit that they distributed blatantly false statements in order to maintain higher short-term profits. Millions of Americans were killed by lung cancer all in the name of making money.

The tobacco industry was able to get away with this deception for such a long time due to the "latency period" or the long lag between the time when the damage is done and the time the public finally notices that there's a problem. With cancer, the latency period is about twenty to forty years. With bug infestations the latency period is even longer. The problem with these long latency periods is that, by the time the public finally catches on to the deception, it may be too late to do anything about it. The crooks will have already robbed the bank and disappeared into the night.

Our legal system is just not set up to hold criminals accountable for actions and decisions that were made forty years ago. Nor is it reasonable to expect the public to

become experts on everything from old growth forests to cigarettes in order to protect themselves from these slick con artists.

The only real long-term solution, this researcher concluded, was to change the economic system of corporate greed that creates these kind of problems. What was needed was a system that discouraged destruction instead of rewarding it.

The only way to stop bug infestation was to create an economic system that was based upon the long-term value of economic conservation instead of the short-term greed of economic exploitation. He furthered this "economic" argument by pointing out that Old Growth forests are not only the last remaining home for many Endangered Species, but they are also the source of many other things that are essential to our own survival. The diversity of plants found in Old Growth forests has over the centuries been our primary source for both the food we eat when we are well, such as the humble potato, and the medicines we take when we are ill, such as most antibiotics. Old Growth forests are our primary source of clean water and the topsoil we need to grow crops. Old Growth Forests also reduce flooding by holding onto water and by stabilizing the climate. He noted that we lose far more money every year trying to repair flood damage down stream from clearcuts than we gained by creating the clearcuts. The forests are therefore clearly worth much more money to us in the long run if we leave them standing than if we chop them down.

One researcher related the bug attacks in Old Growth forests to Acid Rain which is a type of rain which carries air pollution from the cities onto the Old Growth trees. This acidic pollution weakens the bark and needles of the ancient trees and they are then more easily attacked by gypsy moths living in nearby tree farms.

Some researchers even went so far as to blame the problem on Global Warming, or human pollution making the whole planet hotter. They noted that our planet was getting hotter much faster than at any time in the past. They contended that the trees simply could not adjust fast enough to this new kind of climate change. Ominously, they pointed out that since the giant trees consume carbon dioxide, a gas humans produce which is causing Global Warming, losing the giant trees would mean more carbon dioxide in the air and even faster Global Warming!

Still other studies blamed the bug problem on holes in the ozone layer. In the past few years human pollution has gotten so bad that it is actually thinning our protective atmosphere and allowing dangerous radiation in to harm the trees, not to mention all the other plants and animals. One researcher pointed out that the big trees produce a lot of oxygen and that our protective ozone layer is also made of oxygen. He theorized that fewer trees would mean less oxygen and less ozone and therefore still larger ozone holes and even greater loss of trees. It was important, he argued, to understand the gypsy moth invasions before it was too late, not only to save the forests, but also to save ourselves.

The more I studied, the more complicated the problem seemed to become. I began to see where that idea came from that everything was connected to everything else. Still, two things were made clear by all of the studies. The first was that we humans appeared to be a major part of the problem. The second was that the problem was getting worse.

As I studied I compared ideas over the phone with Doc Hazelwood. If there was one thing I had learned from him, it was the importance of thoroughly studying a subject before attempting to analyze the data in a research paper. During a Biochemistry course that I had taken from him the preceding year, I had turned in what I thought had been a well written five-page paper. When I got it back, I was shocked that I had gotten a C- on my report.

Even more embarrassing, Doc had written ten pages of corrections and comments on my five-page report! I recalled thinking that he had put more time and effort into my report than I had. It was as if he cared more about my intellectual potential and growth than I did myself. His comments had given me a new understanding of what it meant to research a topic. His expectations had given me a new standard to shoot for, one which I have been striving hard to live up to ever since.

I wanted my report to reflect that lesson. My only problem was that I hadn't come up with a single new thing to report. The bark turned out to be nearly identical to the bark found on other trees in dying forests. The moths seemed to be just like many other common moths found in other forests. In fact, the only difference I could find was the total absence of gypsy moths ... there wasn't a single one in any of my traps. But that absence had already been observed and well documented during an earlier study at the edge of this forest. I had gone to the heart of the Border Range Wilderness but had found nothing new!

Then it happened. Hazelwood wrote me a brief letter of apology. Evidently, my project had been suddenly canceled. The next day, I received a similar letter from the Forest Service likewise stating that the funding had been terminated. Just days before, the newly elected Congress had cut all funding for any project that included "ecological research." These new members of Congress had decided that the solution to the gypsy moth problem was to simply clear-cut all forests that had any gypsy moths in them. The idea was to "salvage" the trees by logging them before the gypsy moths could eat them.

In a strange twist of logic, biologists and ecologists were now seen as the enemy. The new Congressional mandate, called the "Salvage Rider" Act by the media, not only eliminated all ecological research, but it also exempted these new logging operations from any legal challenges by environmental groups, who had previously saved Endangered Species by challenging the legality of excessive logging in Court. Logging was to now resume without interruption ... and without regard to whether it would kill off the Endangered Species living in the remaining patches of Old Growth Forest.

I was politely thanked for my services and within days went from being a researcher to being a summer vacationer. The study was over. I was saved by the bell. I wouldn't have to write my report. I should have been glad. After all, I really had nothing to report anyway.

But I wasn't glad. Something was bothering me. It wasn't just the jokes going around the Ranger Station about how their summer workers project had been "moth-balled". No, it was something else. Something Lou had said ... something about what fools flatlanders were.

I spent the last two weeks of my summer vacation on a long backpacking trip in an Old Growth Forest in northeastern Oregon; but not even that cheered me up. I had hoped that this hike would bring some kind of positive closure to an otherwise wasted summer. But I had now learned to recognize the early telltale signs of a gypsy moth invasion and I could tell that the forest I was in was under attack. I could see it in the brownish color of the needles on the lower branches and in the whitish tinge on the bark of nearly all the trees. There was a strange silence in this forest ... like the trees had already resigned themselves to their fate. There were no birds singing and no spiders weaving webs. The very forest I was walking through was slowly dying and I was helpless to stop it.

I remembered Chris's starfish story ... and I wished that somehow I could save this starfish; but I did not know how. Its fate seemed hopeless. If the gypsy moths didn't destroy it, the loggers surely would.

As I walked through the dying forest, I felt like the trees were looking at me. Or even worse, like they were crying out to me. But what could I do?

Then there were those dreams... about the prophesy of White Bird and the wooden people and the spring of life. What did the Indian girl say? Something about the power of my name. But I couldn't remember. Or perhaps I didn't want to remember.

The whole thing was pointless. It was a string of coincidences that my mind had somehow blown out of all proportion. The wind may be old, but it can't talk. And neither can trees. It was nothing more than crazy dreams... Dreams I was now trying hard to forget.

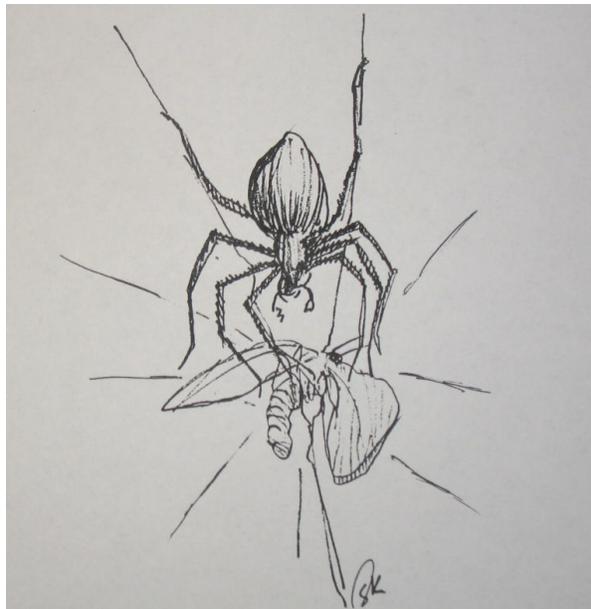
But on my final night in this dying forest, I had yet another dream. The Indian girl was trying to teach me how to listen to the trees. Her voice kept whispering in my ears,

*"Listen, listen... to the trees...
Close your eyes... and learn to see."*

But no matter how hard I tried, I just couldn't hear what they were saying. As I sat there crying in the forest, she put her hand on my shoulder and softly whispered,

*"Blue birds learn to fly when the wind blows.
So don't cry... Just hear the trees.
Dark clouds can turn into rainbows
And I know... some day you'll see."*

But her faith in me was misplaced. The next day I left the forest behind and resolved to never go back. I wanted to get as far away from this dying place as I could. Still, the pain and the questions and the dreams kept following me... even after I got back to the University. I felt like a moth trapped in a spider's web. Try as hard as I might, there was no escaping it. I remembered what Lou had said about flatlanders and fools. I realized now I was one of those flatlanders. Was I also a fool?



Trapped like a moth in a spider's web

SNOWBIRDS

PART TWO

FALL



*I asked a squirrel and here's what he said
"As colors change from green to red,
Save all you can in the warm days of Fall.
If you don't, in the Winter, you won't eat at all."*

*"How much should we save of this planet of ours?
How shall we save it and when shall we start?"*

*"The sooner the better," the squirrel replied,
"And as much as you can if you want to survive.
As for how you can save it, you can learn that from me.
Take only the nuts, don't chop down the tree."*

Chapter Five ... Dinosaurs and Passenger Pigeons

*This we know. All things are connected.
Like the blood which unites one family. All things are connected.
Whatever befalls the earth befalls the sons of the earth.
Man did not weave the web of life: he is merely a strand in it.
Whatever he does to the web, he does to himself.*

Chief Seattle

It was good to be back at the University. I had been looking forward to starting my senior year. Also I was happy to see Chris again. Still, despite these positive feelings, the first few weeks of school have always been a hard adjustment for me. It wasn't just getting up early to attend morning classes or staying up late doing homework; rather, it was that Fall was a time of change. With the beginning of each quarter, I was forced to let go of old ideas and old projects in order to make room for new ones. I felt like a tree that was losing its leaves, whether it was ready or not. Like most people I was, subconsciously at least, uncomfortable with change.

Still, within a month I had almost forgotten the sour events of the preceding summer. I reasoned that I had done my best and it was time for me to move on to other things. It wasn't my fault the study had been a failure and the funding had gotten canceled. What else could I do? I told myself the whole matter was hopeless. It was time for me to get over it and get on with the rest of my life.

Then, on the second Monday in October, a letter arrived. It was amazing it ever got to me, considering it didn't even have a zip code on it. It was simply addressed to: David Spring, Biology Department, Washington State University. The letter had been delivered to the Biology Department and the secretary in the office was nice enough to look up my address in the school directory and forward it to me.

I felt apprehensive about that letter the moment I saw it. It was post-marked "Salmon Falls, Idaho". The date on the post-mark was a month old. The printing on the front of the envelope was poorly done, like it had been written by a child. There was no return address, but I knew instantly who it was from. I took the letter up to my room and opened it. The hand written note inside consisted of a single piece of paper which read:

David,

I'm writing you cause I don't know what else to do. It looks like I might be dead pretty soon. While it's too late for me maybe you can still do something about it. You were right when you said there must be something different about the Border Range. But it's not just the trees and moths. It's those yellow rocks. You might as well know it. There's gold up here, lots of it, too much of it, and somehow the big mine owners have found out about it.

The crazy thing is they're willing to kill me for that gold and I don't even want it! But flatlanders go nuts over those yellow rocks. They'll do practically anything to get their hands on them. The fools from the mining company have offered me a pile of money if I'd sell them my claim. But they got no brains, as if green paper means any more to me than yellow rocks!

So now, they've gotten real nasty. First, they burned my cabin down. Then they shot my mule. They're saying I'm next. They got helicopters flyin' over me all the time now. But that's not why I'm writing. I'm writing cause I'm hoping you can save my birds.

You see, I know why there's no bad moths on my trees. It's cause my birds ate 'em all. I also know if they kill my birds, those moths you were talking about will take over and kill my trees. Those miners will kill my birds for sure cause my birds live in the same cave the gold is in!

These are very special birds. My father called them "Snow Birds" cause they only live up here in the snow. They live in a cave on the highest peak above my cabin. These birds only fly at night and they have wings as white as angel's wings and feathers that glow in the dark. My mother said they're sacred birds. She called them messengers of the Great Spirit, cause they glow like the sun. I know it sounds crazy but you gotta believe me! I call them "my birds" cause they know me and cause it's my job to protect them. But pretty soon I'm gonna be dead. Then it will be up to you kid. I hope you can save my birds. Who knows but if you save them now, maybe some day those birds will save you. God bless and guide you. Lou

It all became clear now, not only why Lou's trees were so healthy, but also why Lou was so secretive. It wasn't the gold he was trying to protect. It was his birds. I suddenly realized that I too had seen them through the cabin window that night – Snow Birds – shimmering and dancing like ghosts in the moonlit sky!

I wanted to tell Dr. Hazelwood this incredible news, but unfortunately it was well past 5 p.m. That night I could hardly sleep. The next morning I was waiting by his office door. After what seemed to be an eternity, Doc finally came walking up the stairs.

"Well, hi, Dave. How are you this morning?"

"Doc, I've got to talk to you. Have you got a minute?"

"Sure, Dave. Come on in. My first class isn't for almost an hour."

Doc's pet cockateel,, Tweety interrupted our discussion by saying "Hello, Doc ... How are you?"

I smiled as Doc said, almost like he was talking to another person, "I'm fine Tweety ... How are you?"

Tweety replied, "More food, please ... Tweety needs more food."

While Doc was placing more food in the bird feeder, he asked, "So, Dave, what can I do for you?"

"Doc, do you remember that summer job you recommended for me?"

"Yes, It was too bad the funding got terminated, but that's how things go some ... "

"Doc," I interrupted, "while I was up in the mountains, before the project was canceled, I met a strange old miner named Lou. He was kind of a recluse. I didn't get to know him very well. But then yesterday I got this letter from him. It explained a lot. I'm hoping you could read it and tell me if you think what he said might possibly be true."

"Sure, Dave," Doc smiled, "Let me see it."

I handed Doc the letter and he pulled out a pair of glasses. At first he read it rather casually, but as the letter went on, he read it more intently. At the end, he turned the letter over to see if there was any more written on the back side. He then paused for a moment to collect his thoughts.

Finally, he said, "Well, this is interesting. What do you think of this, Dave?"

"Doc, I know it sounds crazy, but I think old Lou's telling the truth. You see, when I was up at his cabin, I thought I saw some ghosts one night, but now I think maybe they were those Snow Birds he was talking about."

"Really?" Doc's eyebrows raised, "Well, that is interesting."

"Doc, what I want to know is if you think such a thing is even possible, I mean about Snow Birds living in caves and glowing in the dark and all."

Doc thought for a moment and said, "That's a tough question. I guess just about anything's possible. Lord knows, I've seen some strange animals in my life. This wouldn't even be the strangest, but it would be near the top."

"As for living in the snow, many species of animals survived by adapting to the snow during the last Ice Age; and of course living in caves would actually make sense. Some birds in Antarctica live in caves in order to escape the harsh weather. And night flying might explain why we hadn't discovered them earlier."

"As for glowing in the dark," Doc continued, "that's more common than you might think. It's called 'bioluminescence.' There are many fish and even a few bugs that glow in the dark. But glowing birds.. well, that opens up a very old controversy."

Doc went to his book shelf and pulled out an old and tattered book. He opened the book and handed it to me. There in the book was a picture of a Glowing White Dove sitting on the shoulder of an angel.

Doc explained, "This picture is nearly 2,000 years old. It was found in an early Christian Church. The glowing bird was thought to represent the Holy Spirit. Early Church leaders often painted this white glowing bird in their sacred murals. Ancient Church doctrine was that Salvation is found through this Holy Spirit. Some scholars have studied these ancient myths. The glowing white bird, called the "dove of peace" also appeared in the legend of Noah and in the legend of Moses. There are even pictures of glowing white doves on the walls inside the Great Pyramids of Egypt. Because these stories of glowing white birds go back as far as civilization itself, some Biologists have speculated that a species of such birds may have actually once existed all around the world".

"So, you think maybe ... "

"Dave, it's hard to know what to think when it comes to birds. We seem to be discovering new species of birds just about every day. Why, it was only recently we discovered how birds evolved and learned to fly in the first place."

"Really, what do you mean?"

"It was archeologists actually. I'm sure you're aware that the dinosaurs were wiped out suddenly and mysteriously about 65 million years ago. Well, it turns out a few of those dinosaurs survived. You see, over the millions of years prior to their disappearance, some of the dinosaurs had learned how to fly ... and those flying dinosaurs were somehow able to survive whatever it was that killed their non-flying cousins. We now call them 'birds', but in reality our feathered friends are the closest living direct descendants left of the group of animals we know as dinosaurs. Quite a fascinating history, don't you think?"

"So I wouldn't be surprised if these birds did exist. Heck, it wouldn't even surprise me if you told me they could talk!" Doc glanced over at his cockateels with a wink and said, "Right Tweedy?"

Tweedy replied, "Right Doc ... Doc is right." We both laughed.

"I guess the important question now," Doc continued, "is what can be done to help them? If there is an isolated population of these birds, it wouldn't take much to wipe them out. I'm afraid your friend Lou might have a valid concern. There's no doubt these birds would qualify for protection under the Endangered Species Act, but by the time all the required studies were completed and the paperwork approved, I'm afraid it would be too late. Unfortunately, at this point, I don't see what else can be done for them."

"But Doc," I pleaded, "I was hoping you would know how to save them."

"David," Doc said seriously, "I wish I could help you, but I really ... " He must have seen the dejected look on my face because he stopped in mid-sentence and, changing to a softer tone of voice, said, "Listen, Dave, I have some friends who have friends in Washington, DC You know that summer job you had? Well it was sponsored by a Senator from back East. Perhaps he can help us. I'll see what I can do."

My face brightened, at least until Doc added, "But Dave, it's going to take a lot more than a letter to get anything done about this. I really think you should go back to Salmon Falls and talk to your friend Lou. See if you can get some pictures of these birds, or feathers or something we can use as evidence that these birds exist."

"But Doc," I protested, "what about my classes? I can't just leave."

"Listen to me Dave," Doc got very serious. "If this really is an Endangered Species, we may only have this one chance to save them. And if these birds can help save Old Growth Forests, well, you can always take classes, but when an entire species is wiped out, it's gone forever."

"Besides," he continued. "Your friend Lou might not talk to anyone else. So it's got to be you, Dave, and you should go now. Don't worry about the college. I'll take care of the paperwork at this end, but you should get on the next bus out of town!"

* * *

The rest of that day and even late in to the evening, I sat alone in the Biology department library just staring at books ... books about the evolution of birds ... Living Species ... Endangered Species ... Extinct Species.

I read about the great mystery of what happened to the dinosaurs. Dinosaurs ruled the Earth for 100 million years and then suddenly, about 65 million years ago, they were all wiped out. There were many theories as to why the dinosaurs went extinct, but researchers agreed that none of our current theories can truly explain their mysterious demise. One common theory is that an asteroid struck the Earth and wiped them all out. But this theory doesn't explain why all the dinosaurs in every part of the planet were wiped out. Nor does it match our knowledge from dinosaur bones which indicated that the extinction process took place during a period of about 20,000 to 50,000 years. Most importantly the asteroid theory doesn't explain how or why birds and mammals, including our own ancestors, survived.

It is a puzzle scientists are still trying to put together. One author pointed out that every time we wipe out another species, it's like throwing away a piece of this important puzzle. It makes it that much harder to find the solution. Like many others, this author also warned that our own survival may depend on solving this puzzle ... so we shouldn't carelessly throw away any more pieces. (I wondered if this was why pieces and species had the same letters.)

Another scientist, studying why birds survived while other dinosaurs did not, thought it might have to do with the fact that birds, like humans, are warm-blooded. Birds produce their own heat and could therefore keep warm even if it got suddenly cold. Other researchers discounted this theory by concluding that many dinosaurs, like modern frogs, were also warm-blooded but still went extinct.

A later study suggested that perhaps the survival of birds was due to their heart. It seems that, while frogs have a three-chamber heart, birds like humans have a four-chamber heart. While this study pointed out an amazing similarity between the hearts of humans and the hearts of birds, it failed to explain how frogs managed to survive the great disaster 65 million years ago.

Still another study pointed out that in the billion-year history of life on planet Earth, there have only been two periods of mass extinction of plants and animals. One period was 65 million years ago when dinosaurs along with many other plants and animals died out. The other period has been the past 100 years. This researcher noted that the rate of extinction has increased recently to the point where today unique and irreplaceable species of plants and animals are going extinct at a rate faster than at any other time in the Earth's history – even faster than in the dinosaurs last days! This is because humans are now destroying the environment at a record pace. This scientist pointed out that, unless we end our current war on the environment, within the next ten years an estimated 5,000 species of plants and animals will become extinct in North America alone.

This researcher proposed the theory that perhaps 65 million years ago a "dominant dinosaur" evolved who was much smarter than other dinosaurs. This smart dinosaur gradually wiped out all the other dinosaurs, who were seen as "the competition." The birds eluded capture because they had the ability to fly. These advanced dinosaurs also wiped out many other plants and animals, but then they died off suddenly when they inadvertently destroyed their last food supply. This researcher made a direct comparison from the time of the dinosaurs to our own time. He concluded that our present day destruction of Endangered Species was like the burning of rare and priceless books just to keep the bon fire going. It was as if we didn't realize that when the rare books are gone, they are gone forever. He maintained it was like robbing from our own children, asserting that all of Earth's life forms belong not to us, but to future generations. I wondered "Could there once have been a dinosaur that robbed its own children of their inheritance?"

Another scientist commented that the "dominant dinosaur" theory didn't explain why so many plants and animals in the oceans went extinct during the same time period many plants and animals on land were wiped out. This researcher noted that over ninety percent of the earth's forests were mysteriously destroyed 65 million years ago. Without the stabilizing influence that forests had on the weather, the entire planet became a barren, lifeless desert where large animals such as dinosaurs could not survive. This scientist theorized that the forests were destroyed by large powerful "tree-eating dinosaurs" who were capable of knocking over and eating entire trees. These giant dinosaurs inhaled massive amounts of oxygen and exhaled equal amounts of carbon dioxide. Trees would normally consume the carbon dioxide and change it back to oxygen, but because most of the trees were destroyed the carbon dioxide built up quickly and warmed up the earth, turning the planet into a barren, lifeless desert. Equally devastating, the lack of oxygen led to "holes" in the ozone layer of the atmosphere. Without the protection of the ozone layer, deadly ultraviolet light from the sun passed through the atmosphere and killed off all the plankton (small plants) that lived on the surface of the ocean. Since the plankton were the food source for most of the fish in the ocean, when they died, then most of the fish went extinct also.

These same plankton produced almost as much oxygen as the trees in the forest. As both the plankton and the trees were wiped out, the holes in the ozone layer kept growing larger until, finally, so much ultraviolet light was getting through the atmosphere that the "tree-eating dinosaurs," who triggered the catastrophe to begin with, were themselves wiped out. The only animals to survive this great disaster were those animals who lived deep in the small patches of remaining forests. These animals included birds, frogs, squirrels and our own ancestors (it is well known that we humans evolved from animals that originally lived in forests). This scientist theorized that it was the dense foliage of the trees themselves that had stopped the ultraviolet light and protected the animals living in the forest.

This researcher reasoned that, in order for "tree-eating" dinosaurs to have such a huge effect on the weather, they must have consumed over 90 percent of the world's forests. This process of climatic change would have taken a very long time, perhaps many thousand years, and thus this new theory more closely matched the record of dinosaur bones than did the "asteroid" theory.

The scientist ended his paper by pointing out that we humans have a track-record very similar to a tree-eating dinosaur. Over the past twenty thousand years, wherever we humans have gone, from Egypt to Persia to America, we have wiped out forests and created massive deserts. He noted that we have already wiped out almost as much of the forest as the "tree-eating dinosaur" did. We are also witnessing "ozone holes" and ultraviolet light is at this very moment wiping out much of the plankton on the surface of the ocean.

The researcher warned that we may be entering the same "downward spiral" that caused the demise of the dinosaurs. I wondered, "Could it be that we are really repeating the exact same mistake as the 'tree-eating dinosaurs'?"

Then, while reading about modern extinction, I came across a drawing of a bird called a "passenger pigeon." The book said that there used to be billions of these birds that once migrated across the East Coast of the United States. The book explained that there used to be more passenger pigeons in North America than all the humans in the world. They were all wiped out in a matter of years. None left. Not a single bird survived. All that was left of this beautiful blue bird was a drawing in a book.



PASSENGER PIGEONS, DRAWING BY JOHN J. AUDOBON

It described passenger pigeons as having a number of human-like traits and characteristics. They were very social birds. They liked to migrate in large flocks. One flock alone was described as being over a mile wide and 240 miles long! It took all day for this flock to pass overhead and the sky was so dense with birds that the sun had been blocked out for hours.

It was estimated that there were over two billion birds in that one flock. What a sight that must have been! A sight that none of us will ever get to see.

Passenger pigeons shared another trait with humans. While other birds would lay as many as twelve eggs a year, passenger pigeons would lay only one. They were very faithful and caring birds to their young, their partners and to the other birds in their community. These birds also had a very unusual and highly structured language that they used to communicate to their mates. Their song was described as "strange, bell-like wooing notes" which, from a distance, sounded like the ringing of bells. Because of the protection afforded by their social network and group living, passenger pigeons lived much longer than other birds. Often they would live to be more than 30 years old. They were in fact described as being "the most successful species of animals that the world has ever known." One author observed that humans will need to survive for ten million more years at our current population levels in order to duplicate the feat of these amazing birds.

I wondered, what could we have learned from studying this bird? A bird that dated its lineage clear back to the time of the dinosaurs ... and survived millions of years of natural catastrophes. Could we have learned what killed the other dinosaurs? Could we have learned the secret of how "birds" managed to survive the great disaster?

Then, I thought about the end of Lou's letter ... "Maybe some day those birds will save you." Could it be that some day we will need to learn the secret of the birds if our species is to survive the next disaster?

But if that secret was held in the genes of the passenger pigeon, then we will never know the answer – because those incredible birds, after having survived for so long, were all wiped out in just a few short years of contact with humans. Our ancestors slaughtered these birds by the billions, using everything from guns, dynamite and clubs to nets, fires and traps. In 1861 alone, fifteen million pigeons were killed and shipped from a single nesting site at Petoskey, Michigan. Two million passenger pigeons had been killed by a single man that summer. The birds were sold for two cents each to restaurants in Chicago, Boston and New York.



HUNTERS "SHOOTING 'WILD PIGEONS' IN IOWA"

Copied from Leslie's Illustrated Newspaper, September 21, 1867 and reprinted in Natural Resources Conservation, 1975 by Oliver S. Owen. The gunner is firing point blank into the densely massed birds. (State Historical Society of Wisconsin)

By the turn of the century, our Government slowly realized that the whole population of these beautiful blue birds was on the verge of extinction. Laws were enacted to protect the birds while they were nesting, but the laws were widely ignored. Folks just didn't believe the numerous warnings that scientists had given them. Instead, they believed there were plenty of birds left. By the time people finally realized there was a problem, it was too late. The last passenger pigeon, named Martha, died at the Cincinnati Zoo on September 14, 1918. The last male had died on July 10, 1910. He had been Martha's companion for many years, but they didn't nest. Evidently these birds were so social that they required quite a large number of them to be gathered together before nesting and mating instincts were triggered.

Martha spent the last eight years of her life totally alone. Given how social these birds were, this must have been a hardship and a loneliness beyond anything we humans could ever imagine.

I wondered what other species we humans had wiped out over the years, maybe without even knowing they existed. Species we would never know about, not even a drawing in a book. I thought about the Snow Birds hiding out in their mountain cave. That cave had been a safe refuge from storms for how long? A million years?

But the Snow Birds were in danger now, all because of some species that had just climbed down from the jungle trees yesterday (as far as evolutionary time was concerned) ... all because this new and crazy species had a fascination for yellow rocks. "What a trade," I thought. "Wipe out the Snow Birds ... get a few yellow rocks. What a crazy species I belong to."

Reading about the extinct pigeons had made me pretty sad. But just as the library was about to close, I got a welcome surprise. Chris came walking in. She smiled and said, "I thought I'd find you here. Come on, I'll walk you home!"

We walked quietly across campus and back to my small apartment just down the hill. After a while Chris said, "Dave, I talked with Doc Hazelwood this afternoon. He told me about the letter and that you might leave school to ... that you might be able to save an Endangered Species. I just want you to know I'm very proud of you ... and I really think you should do it."

I told Chris about the passenger pigeons and that I had decided to go because of them. Nothing I could do would ever bring back the passenger pigeons, but maybe I could stop it from happening again. We humans have wiped out too many species already. It had to stop. People had to start taking a stand and making a commitment. Chris, who was kind of a mush ball for sad animal stories, was near tears over the story about the passenger pigeons. When we got to my door she said, "Good luck, Dave. I hope you can do it. If you need any help just let me know, cause I miss those passenger pigeons too."

That night, I could hardly sleep. I couldn't get the tragedy of the Passenger Pigeons out of my mind. Even in my dreams I saw them, a flock of a billion birds flying slowly across the night sky. As they flew closer I could also hear them calling. They sang a beautiful yet haunting song which sounded like the ringing of bells. It seemed as if they were trying to warn me about something. I listened very hard but I couldn't tell what it was. Then, I awoke in a cold sweat to the sound of thunder and wind and rain outside my open window. Suddenly, there was a flash of lightening ... and, in that brief moment, I thought I saw the last of those magnificent blue birds flying into a cloud on the horizon. Their song now seemed to echo in the sound of the wind as it blew through the trees. The rain fell hard as though it were the tears of a billion birds.

As I sat there, still looking at the storm outside my window, a cold chill ran down my spine. I remembered a sentence I had read in a book earlier that night ...

*"They were bluer than the sky was blue ...
and their song was truer than any song you ever knew."*

The next morning found me at the Bus Station. During the ride to Salmon Falls, I had plenty of time to look out the window at the rolling foothills of Eastern Washington and Central Idaho. "Sixty-five Million Years," I thought. "How much had those hills changed over that period of time?" Occasionally, I would see a bird and I would think about dinosaurs. Dinosaurs and passenger pigeons. Then I would think about the starfish and the gypsy moths, the Dreamers, the hermit, the ghosts and the Snow Birds. Somehow there must be a connection, but I just couldn't figure out what it was.

As the bus got closer to Salmon Falls, I tried hard to refocus my thoughts. I began to wonder, "What should I ask Lou? What could I do to help?"

By the time the bus reached Salmon Falls, it was nearly dark.

Chapter Six ... Like Canaries In a Coal Mine

*Learn to dream and you will learn the truth... **White Bird, 1865***

*Let us learn to dream and we shall learn the truth... **August Kekule 1865***

(German Biochemist whose dream of a snake swallowing its tail revealed the structure of Carbon compounds. He called this carbon structure "the circle of life".)

I got off the bus and walked across the street to the Backwoods Cafe, which was basically the only restaurant left in town. However, I didn't make it past the entrance. Instead I just stood by the doorway, frozen in place, my eyes fixed on a small yellow poster in the window that read:

| |
|---|
| <p style="text-align:center">MEMORIAL SERVICE for Luther Muir Wednesday Evening, 6 p.m. at the First Congregational Church FREE FOOD AFTER SERVICE Provided courtesy of Mountain Mining Corporation</p> |
|---|

I was too late! Tears came to my eyes. The fate Lou had predicted in his letter had already come to pass. I guess I didn't need to worry about what I was going to ask old Lou. I was stunned. I didn't know what to do.

I was half-thinking of getting right back on the bus when I suddenly realized that THIS was Wednesday and almost 6 p.m.! The least I could do was attend his funeral service. I quickly headed for the First Congregational Church, which was of course the only church in Salmon Falls.

As I opened the large heavy door, I was surprised to discover that the small church was completely full, not a seat left in the house. I didn't think there were this many people in the entire town! Standing quietly in the back with about a dozen other mourners, I listened as a gray-haired lady in a faded black dress played an old piano and sang "Amazing Grace" slowly and slightly off key.

Up at the front, next to the podium, was a closed casket with large bouquets of flowers on each side of it. On top of the casket was Lou's old gray Filson hat.

I overheard one of the mourners next to me telling another, "Folks say there wasn't much left of old Lou after that fall he took. What a terrible way to die."

The other mourner replied sarcastically, "Is there any good way to go?"

After a few minutes, the minister came up to the podium and, when the music had finished, he began to speak.

"Dearly beloved ... friends and neighbors. The loss of our Brother Luther comes as a great shock to all of us here in Salmon Falls ... But as difficult as it is, we must find a way to get past our grieving ... with hope and courage ... that something good might come out of this tragic loss.

"While the Lord has taken our Brother Luther away from us, it appears that He has also blessed our community with a great miracle ... one I'm sure would greatly please our Brother Luther.

"Friends, we have with us today, Mr. Chetum, who is with the Mountain Mining Corporation. He has told me that he too shares our grief over the loss of our dear departed Brother, and he has come here tonight to make an announcement that is sure to help our community get past that grief and back on its feet again ... Mr. Chetum?"

A man in a black suit took the podium and smiled briefly. Then he corrected himself changing to a more serious demeanor as he said, "Thank you Reverend Father."

Mr. Chetum was a short thin man who looked nervous as he stood at the podium. He was partially bald and his thick glasses reflected the church lights above him. His high, thin voice trembled as he read a prepared statement to us.

"We at Mountain Mining Corporation are aware that times have been pretty tough here in Salmon Falls these past few years. The logging industry has been devastated, first by the Spotted Owl problem and more recently by the invasion of Gypsy Moths. Still all this town needs is a new business to give it a fresh start. We, at Mountain Mining, believe there is a future here in Salmon Falls, and so tonight it is my privilege to announce that we have decided to do something about it."

Mr. Chetum looked up from his paper and nervously glanced at the packed house in front of him. Then after adjusting his glasses he continued, "The Mountain Mining Corporation was very close to Lou during his final days. We know that more than anything Lou wanted his mine to continue. In fact, that was Lou's 'last wish' before his unfortunate demise. So tonight, as we gather here to mourn his loss, it is only fitting we announce to you all that, with the approval of the Forest Service, we have taken over Lou's claim under the terms of the Mining Act of 1872. Moreover, we are prepared to invest up to twenty million dollars in order to make old Lou's mine profitable ... and to restore the great city of Salmon Falls to the prosperous times it once enjoyed!" (This announcement was greeted with lots of applause.)

"And in honor of our departed friend, we plan to call our new mine the "Luther Muir Memorial Mine." (This received only a courteous smattering of applause.)

"That's about all I have to say ... ah, Father?"

"Thank you, Mr. Chetum, for that wonderful news and for your heartfelt words of encouragement."

"Well, folks, I suppose I should say a few words about our Brother Luther. After all, this is his memorial service!" The minister laughed, but no one got the joke, if there was one, so he quickly continued, "But to be honest, I believe this is the first time old Lou has ever set foot, so to speak, in our humble church. Since I didn't really get to know him very well, I'm wondering if anyone here tonight might have something good to say, on behalf of old Lou, that they could share with us at this time."

The church became so quiet you could hear the benches squeak. After a few embarrassing moments, the minister continued, "I see. Well, if there is no more ... "

Just then an elderly lady stood up and spoke loudly and clearly, "I've got something good to say about Lou!"

The minister with a look of relief said, "Thank you, Paula, please continue."

"As most of you know, I run the Hardware Store ... and I want to point out that Lou always paid his bill, in full, which is more than I can say 'bout the rest of you – including you, your holiness. Not only that but he never mistreated animals. Why, that old mule of his was probably the best cared-for animal in this county! And I know that most of you folks are just as glad to see him gone - but I for one am gonna miss him."

The lady sat down as the minister (now slightly embarrassed) said, "Thank you Paula, that was ... "

"And another thing!" Paula interrupted as she jumped back up, "Lou never once cursed in front of a lady. 'Course he never said hardly anything in front of a lady, but I think he's to be commended for his politeness. We could use a little more of that around this town."

The guy standing next to me mumbled, "Lou was about as polite as my drill sergeant at boot camp."

Meanwhile, the minister was saying, "Thank you, Paula. Those words were beautifully spoken, and I'm sure our Lord Jesus will take them into account when he judges our dear departed brother." Then under his breath the minister added, "not that it would do any good." He then continued ...

"Well now, unless anyone has something they'd like to add, I guess this concludes the service, and we can get on to eating all the wonderful food and beverages provided by the nice gentleman from Mountain Mining. After all, I'm sure that's what our Brother Lou would want. So folks, try not to grieve too much and PLEASE don't spill anything on our new wood floor!"

He had barely finished talking before the crowd began a mad dash for the food and beverage table. Even the elderly lady at the piano speeded up the final few verses of the last song in order to get over to the food table before it was all gone.

* * * *

I had no idea what to do next. I decided to check into the town's only hotel (actually it was more like a small boarding house). The hotel was run by a friendly retired couple named Howard and Mildred Coats. My bed was comfortable enough, but I still couldn't sleep.

Finally, at about 3 a.m., I got up and wrote a letter to Chris. I told her that Lou was dead and that his mine had been taken over by a large mining company. Lou had been right about everything he had predicted in his letter. I didn't know which I was more sad about – Lou's death, or the impending demise of the Snow Birds. I felt powerless, like knowing a train wreck was about to happen, but being unable to do anything to stop it. I asked Chris to tell Doc Hazelwood about what had occurred; perhaps he would have some ideas.

After finishing the letter, I again tried to go back to sleep. But I couldn't stop thinking about Lou and the Snow Birds. Finally, I decided to go for a walk. After dropping off the letter at the Post Office, I walked around the deserted town for the better part of an hour.

Unlike the night I had spent out in the forest, this night in Salmon Falls was absolutely quiet. There was no breeze blowing down from a glacier – only the cold stillness of the town. The majestic old trees that once stood in this valley had long ago been replaced by an odd assortment of dingy, lifeless buildings. I remembered what Lou had said about town – "Town, now there's a lonely place." I now understood what he meant.

At dawn, I watched the sun come over the buildings. But not even the sunrise cheered me up ... because not a single bird sang that morning to welcome its arrival. There was only the silence of the buildings. It was a deadly silence. Tired, sad and confused, I made my way back to the boarding house and my little room. With my mind still filled with questions that had no answers, I eventually fell asleep.

When I woke up, it was nearly dark again. I could tell by the aroma that they were serving dinner downstairs ... and I was hungry. It had been a day and a half since I had eaten anything. I practically ran down the stairs. The couple who owned the boarding house had already sat down to eat. Fortunately they had prepared plenty of food and, since I was their only guest, I didn't hesitate to fill up my plate. I sat down at the table and thanked them for the great meal.

Mildred smiled and said, "Well, you're very welcome."

Both of them were obviously in a great mood. Mildred could hardly wait to ask me, but she nudged her husband to ask instead. "So," he began, his mouth still full of food, "are you with the new mining company?"

"No, I'm not." I replied. "Actually, I worked at the Ranger Station this past summer and I had come back here to talk with Luther Muir."

"Oh, so you knew old Lou?" Mildred inquired.

"Not really, I only met him once."

"Well," she continued. "It is too bad, what with him dying and all, but it sure has turned out to be a blessing in disguise. Why, everyone is really excited about that mining company coming in. Our minister says the good Lord has blessed us with a miracle."

She slowed down a little when she saw I wasn't exactly sharing her new-found excitement. After a bit she lowered her voice and said, "But of course, it is too bad about old Lou ... I mean, such a terrible accident."

"I never heard how he died."

"It's just as well," she continued. "From what I heard, well, I don't even like to talk of such things. Howard, you tell him."

Howard looked up from his meal, surprised to hear his name. With food still in his mouth he began, "Well, gee, I don't rightly know, but what I heard was that old Lou lost his balance and fell plumb off a cliff. It must have been a terrible sight to watch. Those poor fellows from Mountain Mining, they saw it happen, and they were just grief-stricken over it. They had gone up there to help old Lou and, while they were climbing up to his mine, Lou lost his balance. They tried to grab him before he went over, but it was too late. They found what was left of him at the bottom of the cliff – which wasn't much. Yep, a terrible way to die." Mildred just nodded her head in agreement.

"I wonder," I asked, "how I could find out more ... I mean about Lou's death and about this new mining company and all."

"Well," Howard said, "you could go out to the Ranger Station. They're the ones who've been working with the mining company on the plans for the new mine."

"Thank you Howard, that's a good idea. I think I'll do that."

The next morning I walked to the Ranger Station which is about a mile out of town. They were all quite surprised to see me.

"Well, if it isn't our wildlife biologist!" the head ranger Jake snickered sarcastically. "What brings you back out here? Did you lose some of your moths?" (They all had a good chuckle over that one.)

"No," I smiled politely, "I came here a couple of days ago to see old Lou. Unfortunately, all I got to see was his funeral."

"Yeah, that was too bad about Lou," Jake offered, "but it sure was a break for us. We're going to collect enough in royalties on that new gold mine to completely update and remodel the Ranger Station. We'll even be hiring some more staff – all to help monitor the new mine of course."

"Listen Jake," I interrupted, "that's why I came out here. I'm hoping you can tell me something about Mountain Mining."

"What's there to tell? They're the biggest mining company in the country. They got so much money, they don't know what to do with it. We're really quite lucky they decided to come in here and help us out. What else can I say?"

"Jake, can I talk to you in private? I got something I think you ought to see."

We went into his office and I showed him the letter old Lou had sent me. Jake read it and frowned. Then he looked up at me and sneered, "Are you tryin' to tell me those nice folks at Mountain Mining killed old Lou in order to get his worthless mine?"

"Well, kid, let me tell you something. This town needs Mountain Mining a hell of a lot more than they need us. As far as this crazy business goes about glowing birds, or whatever the hell they are ... well, if you expect me to believe that you got another thing comin'. You forget, kid, I've been up to the Border Range ... and I know for a fact there ain't no glowin' birds up there. I also know Old Lou never wrote nobody nothin'.

So as far as I'm concerned, either someone's playin' an elaborate trick on you ... or you wrote this yourself in order to save a couple of trees. I'll tell you flat out ... whatever it is, it ain't gonna work. If I were you, I'd get myself on the next bus back to the University 'cause that's where the likes of you moth lovers belong ... and you can take this letter with you. I sure as hell don't need it."

Jake shoved the letter at me as he led me out of his office. He then opened the front door of the Ranger Station as if to make his point even clearer.

As I was leaving, I heard someone ask him, "What'd the moth man want?"

Jake replied in disgust, "If I told you, you wouldn't believe it."

So there I was sitting in my room, having realized that no one was going to listen to me. Jake was right; I didn't belong in Salmon Falls. I had failed in my mission. There was nothing else I could do now but give up and leave. That afternoon I loaded my pack, paid Howard and headed for the bus station.

On the way, I happened to walk by the Hardware Store. Through a window, I saw an elderly lady feeding a couple of birds she had in a very large bird cage. It was the same lady who had spoken up for old Lou at the church the other day. What was her name? Brenda? No, Paula!

The bus wasn't due to arrive for nearly an hour, so I decided to go in and thank her for her courage and thoughtfulness.

As I walked in she was saying to her birds, "George, you save some for Martha. That's better."

"Hello," I said rather meekly.

"Well, hi yourself," she replied. "Can I help you?"

"Ah, I didn't really come in to buy anything. I just wanted to thank you for saying those nice things about Lou the other night at the service."

"You'd be the first," she said with disdain. After a brief pause she added, "You're not from around here, are you?"

"No," I answered. "I go to school at the State University. I worked at the Ranger Station this summer and got a chance to meet Lou up at his cabin."

"I sure am gonna miss that old buzzard ... " she said, sadly and mostly to herself.

I decided to switch to a lighter topic, "Those are cute birds you got there."

"They're canaries," she explained, "I got 'em a few years ago ... to keep me company. I'm thinking of putting George here on a diet." She smiled, then turned more serious as she continued, "I used to feed the woodland birds ... used to be lots of birds around Salmon Falls, lots of birds and lots of frogs, but they're all gone now. I read where frogs are just too sensitive to pollution ... 'thin skin' is what the article said. As for the birds, I guess all the clear cuts around here just left them with no place to call home. So I got these canaries to keep me company. They're nice, but it's not the same as those wild birds."

"Guess I miss them too," she sighed. After a brief pause, she added, "But I suppose if it weren't for these canaries, I never would have gotten to know old Lou."

"What do you mean?" I asked.

"Lou came in here one time and, seeing my canaries, he asked if I'd ever heard of how important canaries were to miners; first real words Lou ever spoke to me. When I said no, he proceeded to tell me all about how his Dad used to be a coal miner in Pennsylvania. It seems the miners would bring canaries down in the mines with them. They would keep a close eye on those birds cause canaries were very sensitive to the presence of odorless, poisonous gases in the mine. They took good care of their canaries cause they realized their lives depended on those birds. The miners knew if the canary passed out, they would be next.

"Lou said he thought the whole world was like a giant coal mine; that all of our birds were like the canaries, that they are our warning system, and that we ought to take better care of our birds cause some day all of our lives might depend on them."

She walked over to a large window at the front of the store and, looking outside, she commented, "That's why it kind of worries me that the frogs and birds 'round here are all disappearing. It makes me think that something is wrong ... like we're all in that coal mine ... and the canaries have already passed out ... but no one seems to be paying any attention."

Crossing back to the front counter and looking more at her canaries than at me, she sighed, "Yeah, I'm gonna miss old Lou. Sometimes I think he was the only one around here who really understood what was goin' on."

I thanked her again ... and she thanked me for stopping by.

Leaving the Hardware Store behind, it seemed to have gotten much colder outside. In the darkening October afternoon, I walked the short distance remaining to the bus stop (which was little more than a metal post with a sign on it).

As I stood there alone, silently waiting for the bus to come, I watched the wind blow dust down the nearly deserted main street of Salmon Falls. The dust blew hard against my face - but that was not the reason for my tears. The pain of that cold dusty wind was nothing compared to the bitter hollow feeling inside my heart. I felt frozen like a statue with a decision to make. What could I do? I couldn't stop the wind. But I also couldn't stop the tears. And I couldn't stop thinking about canaries ... glowing canaries in a gold mine.

The bus came and went. And as I watched the bus drive away, I realized I was still standing at the bus stop in the Salmon Falls.

Chapter Seven ... A Different Kind of Golden Rule

The Light shines in the darkness, but the darkness has not understood it.

John 1:5

"I hope I'm not too late for dinner," I said as I opened the door to the boarding house. Mildred replied, "Not at all. We can always set another place. Can't we, Howard?" Howard looked up from his meal, "Sure, pull up a chair."

"So, you decided to stay, did you?" she asked.

"Yes, at least for a couple more days."

"Well, I guess we should have told you. If you stay a whole week, the last two days are free!"

The next morning I went over to the gas station and asked the fellow working in the garage if he knew any place in town where I could rent a car. He looked up from the vehicle he was working on and asked, "How long you need it for?"

"Just a day or two."

"Well, let's see here ... where'd you say you were goin'?"

"Out to Old Lou's cabin ... kind of to pay my last respects."

"A friend of Lou's, eh? Well, you can use my old truck if you want. Just make sure you fill her with gas when you bring her back. The key's in the ignition ... oh, and watch out for the brakes, they don't work so good sometimes!"

Since I was short on money, I accepted his offer. After a quick stop at the local store for food, I headed out of town and followed the logging roads up to the clear cut next to the Border Range Wilderness.

As I neared the end of the road, I passed a couple of new, very large yellow signs which read:

KEEP OUT!
ABSOLUTELY NO TRESPASSING!
Mountain Mining Corporation

But it didn't look like there was anyone around, so I decided to chance it. I parked the truck and began hiking up the trail toward Lou's cabin.

After a few hundred yards, I crested the first small hill and discovered that the old trail was now bisected by a new and very wide gravel road. At the end of the new road was a large building with a huge parking area in front of it and a high metal fence around the whole thing. There was even a guard house at the main gate.

I quickly crossed the road and continued up the old path. Climbing the south-facing ravine as fast as I could in hopes that no one would see me, I made it up to the dense forest in surprisingly good time. Carrying a lighter pack and lacking the awkward box of moth traps sure helped. Also, the coolness of the late fall day made the climbing more bearable. But mainly I was running on fear.

I stopped briefly at the meadow where the birds had sang to the sunrise during my first visit. The meadow was now mysteriously quiet. There wasn't a single bird in sight. It seemed strange that a place which had so many birds just a few months earlier could now be so quiet and still. There was an eerie feeling about it.

The quiet was broken by the loud noise of a helicopter that flew rapidly over my head. As I hid behind a tree, I reasoned that all the helicopters must have scared the

birds away. Perhaps the birds too were running on fear. I was saddened by the change; but I didn't stay there long. Instead I continued climbing up the ridge.

As I got closer to the cabin, remembering Lou's "Bear Traps," I picked up a stick and tapped it cautiously in front of me.

I crested the ridge, expecting to see the cabin, but instead all that was left standing was the metal stove surrounded by blackened pieces of wood. In the corner where Lou's food locker had been, there was now just a mound of rubble. Surveying the destruction below me, brought the reality of Lou's death home. Still I had a hard time accepting that he was really gone. I had thought of Lou as such a strong, powerful force ... almost like life itself. How could it be that he was now dead?

The small valley used to be such a pretty sight ... the stream, the glacier and the mountains ... but now the magic was completely gone.

As I sat there in a kind of psychological shock, my mind drifted back to a lecture Doc Hazelwood had given only a year earlier on the "difference between life and death." It was the first lecture of the only course I had ever taken from him. Like most biology majors, I had completed the usual progression of required classes: General Biology my freshman year, then Botany and Zoology (the study of plants and animals) my sophomore year and finally Biochemistry during my junior year.

Hazelwood taught the Biochem course. I had heard that Biochem (or the chemistry of life) would be a difficult subject, but I was amazed at how incredibly complicated it turned out to be. The text book was over one thousand pages long. During our first class, Hazelwood described Biochemistry as "a matter of life and death." He went on to explain that biology was the study of life and chemistry was in general the study of that which was not alive. Biochemistry was the boundary. It was the process through which "a non-living thing is suddenly brought to life."

He added that this is exactly what happens every time we eat food or drink water. Essentially we are taking things that by themselves are not alive and, by making them part of us, we bring those chemicals into "the circle of life." They become us. They are us.

Hazelwood next went on to explain what he meant by the circle of life ... "Before we can understand the boundary, we must first know a little about life itself. What exactly is life? In general biology, life is defined as that which has the desire and ability to reproduce itself. Therefore life include everything from the smallest virus to the largest whale.

But what is it that gives life that desire and ability to reproduce itself in the first place?

We know it has something to do with a chemical we call DNA, which stands for Dioxiribo-Nucleic-Acid. DNA is an acid that occurs inside the nucleus of all living cells. It contains the message, the instructions, the magic that enables cells to reproduce themselves. But what is DNA made of ? It is made up of carbon, hydrogen, oxygen, nitrogen ... in short the very same stuff that makes up the chair you're sitting on and the air you breath. Obviously the chair is not alive. So it's not what DNA is made of but rather how those molecules are arranged that gives DNA its magic. In short, it is its shape. DNA is shaped like a spiral – a magic kind of circle. It is what we biologists call "the circle of life". This magic spiral is what connects us to all other life forms, every plant and animal, every tree and every bird. Each of us is a part of this magic circle of life."

After Hazelwood finished his description of life, he went on to talk about death ... "While defining life is easy enough, defining death is a little harder. What makes something that was once alive lay down and suddenly die? All the chemicals are still there. All the DNA is still there. So why is it that a thing, which was once living, is now no longer alive? What is the difference between life and death?

The truth is that in many cases we simply don't know. It is like something important, a mysterious unseen force, suddenly leaves. Science doesn't offer much of an explanation here. Some theorists call the missing thing "the desire to live."

Still others simply call it "the power of love." When this power is present, the DNA is alive; when it is missing, then there is death."

"The power of love," I remembered Hazelwood's phrase as I sat there overlooking the blackened rubble. This was the magic that had made Lou's cabin such an inspiring place during my first visit. It was also what was now so obviously missing.

The fire had destroyed not only the wooden boards, but also the love – the magic I had known as old Lou – and no force on Earth could ever bring it back.

I was about ready to get up and look around when a cold firm hand came heavily down on my shoulder and a deep sinister voice said, "Don't move."

Startled, I looked around to see a very large man and a shorter stocky man. Both had an unkempt appearance and both were holding shot guns aimed at me. They escorted me to their helicopter. A short five minute flight brought us down. to the large building I had seen earlier in the day. Once inside, we walked down a long hallway to a door at the far end. One of the men knocked on the door. An impatient voice on the other side said, "Come in!" The larger person opened the door and there, sitting at a desk with the Border Range visible through large windows directly behind him, was the short thin man who spoke at Lou's Funeral ... what was his name?

"Who," he asked, visibly upset at the interruption, "is this?"

"Boss, we found this kid snooping around the old cabin ... "

"You found him where?"

"By the cabin, sir, you know, the one that burned down."

"What was he doing up there?"

"He was sitting on a log, sir."

"I mean besides sitting on a log ... " the boss asked impatiently.

"Uh, I don't really know, sir."

"Did you ask him?"

"Not yet, sir ... We thought we should bring him directly to you."

"I see." The boss looked toward the ceiling and then at me.

"Well, kid, didn't you see the NO TRESPASSING signs?"

"I did ... " I admitted, "but I'm a friend of old Lou's and I ... "

"I wasn't aware old Lou had any friends ... " the boss commented smugly.

"Listen, son," he continued now quite serious, "let me give you some advice.

Your friend Lou is dead and unless you want to wind up likewise, you'd better stay as far away from this place as you can get. Do I make myself clear?"

"Perfectly," I stared back at him.

"We wouldn't want to see you get accidentally shot now, would we? After all this is hunting season."

The boss turned to his two henchmen and said, "See to it that our young misguided friend here gets safely back to Salmon Falls."

He then turned to me and added, "Son, there's a different set of rules out here now. There's a saying about the Golden Rule ... 'whoever has the gold, rules'. Well, we got the gold, so we make the rules."

It was then I finally remembered his name ... "Mr. Chetum," I thought, "how appropriate."

* * *

That night, as I laid on my bed again surrounded by darkness, I thought about what Mr. Chetum had said. As a child, I had been taught a Golden Rule based upon love and caring and consideration for others. I was surprised to learn that some people followed a different kind of Golden Rule ... one based upon greed and selfishness.

I had been taught that if we followed the good Golden Rule, we could make the world a better place. I wondered... if people followed this new, greedy Golden Rule instead, where would it take us? One thing was for sure, this different kind of Golden Rule would mean the end of the Snowbirds ... if it hadn't already.

Chapter Eight ... Another Bear Trap

*"Let me live where there is no ceiling to block the sun,
Let me live where there are no walls to block the wind,
Let me sleep on Mother Earth, that I may know her ways,
Let me live that she may also know me."*

Dreamer prayer

I had been in Salmon Falls nearly a week ... and had gotten nowhere. Lou was dead. The rangers wouldn't listen. And the new miners threatened to kill me if I even went near the Border Range. What else could I do? I was out of options. Or at least that is how it appeared to me at the time. I was up in my room and once again thinking about leaving when there was a knock on my door.

It was Mildred. She said politely, "Mr. Spring, there is someone here to see you."

I went down to the living room and there, sitting on the couch, was Chris! "What a nice surprise!" I said as Chris came over and gave me a hug. "What are you doing here?"

"I've come to help you!" Chris replied optimistically.

"Oh, honey," I moaned, "I wish you could, but things haven't gone very well here."

"So I gathered from your letter. I'm really sorry about your friend Lou dying."

"Chris, that isn't even the half of it." I told her about my visit to the Ranger Station and about my encounter with the "friendly" mining company ... including their threat to shoot me on sight if I went up there again. I ended by saying, "So, Chris, I think it's just hopeless. I don't see anything else I can do. Heck, as far as I know, those birds have already been wiped out. I mean they have a new road and buildings and everything else up there."

"Dave," Chris implored, "You can't give up yet ... not while there's still a chance. Maybe I can think of something. Maybe Doc Hazelwood can think of something. Surely there's something we can do. We've got to at least try to save those birds. Remember what you told me about the passenger pigeons? Well, we can't just walk away and let the same thing happen to Lou's Snow Birds."

"But Chris," I said impatiently, "You don't understand. I've already tried ... and I nearly got shot! What else can we do?"

"Well, for one thing, we can call Doc Hazelwood. He encouraged me to come up here to help you. He also said we could call him collect if we needed to ... and I think we need to."

"Okay, Chris, we'll call him," I conceded. "I can't see how even Doc Hazelwood can help us. Still, I guess you're right ... we should at least call him." Then I added, "But you talk with him, 'cause I'm completely burned out."

Mildred allowed us to use the phone in their study. We both went in and Chris dialed Doc's number. She explained our problem and asked if Doc had any ideas as to what we should do next. She listened for a while and then said, "Thank you Doctor Hazelwood ... I'll let Dave know. Yes, I'll be sure to tell him." Then she hung up and said, "Doctor Hazelwood said his friends in Washington can't help us unless we get them some evidence."

"So, what else is new?" I said disgruntled. "What does Doc Hazelwood think we should do in order to get this evidence?"

"He thinks we should go 'bird watching' ... "

"Bird watching? What does he mean by that?"

"He thinks we ought to sneak out there with a camera and get a picture of the Snow Birds."

"That's easy for him to say!" I exploded. "He's not the one getting shot!"

"Well, he did say to tell you to be careful!"

"Be careful!" I said sarcastically. "He tells us to sneak out there where they have all kinds of guns ... and then he tells us to be careful?"

"Dave, it's a big forest. Surely we can get out there without getting caught. Can't we at least try?"

"No way!" I said emphatically.

"Please?" Chris pleaded.

"Chris! You didn't see those guys. They are very rough, nasty people ... and they mean business. They've already killed Lou, shot his mule and burned down his cabin!"

"That's all the more reason to go. After all, wasn't that Lou's last wish ... that you try to save his Snow Birds? Come on, Dave, all we need is a picture. I brought my little camera with me; it's even got film in it and everything. Can't we at least try?"

I could see I wasn't going to win, so I relented. "Okay, Chris," I said now resigned to my inevitable doom. Then I added, "but under one condition!"

"What's that?" Chris asked, already smiling over her victory.

"When it comes time for my funeral, I want you to stand up and say something nice about me!" Not having been to Lou's funeral, Chris didn't get my joke ... but she was happy. We were about to risk our necks just to get a picture of a bird!

* * *

To get a snapshot of a Snow Bird, we figured it might take a few days of camping in the forest near Lou's cabin. While I had my tent, stove and sleeping bag, Chris did not even own a sleeping bag, at least not one that would keep her warm this time of year up in those mountains. But she called Doc Hazelwood and he arranged to have one sent to her on the next bus. This gave us a couple of days to get our food and clothing packed and to plan our "sneak attack".

It was obvious we could not go up the old trail without getting spotted. The only way we could stay hidden was to climb up through the trees in the small valley formed by the main stream. The map confirmed that this route would eventually lead us up to the base of the glacier and thus to Lou's cabin. The route I had planned was probably impassable most of the year due to the rushing torrents of water in the river. But I was hoping that, since it was Fall, being so close to the river would not be as much of an obstacle as it clearly was the rest of the year.

The problem I worried about most was how to hide our truck and our tent so the "bad guys" wouldn't know we were up there.

Chris said "What about the bedspread?"

"What do you mean?" I asked.

"Well, the bedspread in my room is dark brown with patterns of gold and orange flowers on it. It should fit in real well out in the mountains. After all, it is Fall! What color is your bedspread?"

"To tell you the truth, Chris, I hadn't even noticed."

"Well, maybe we should look." Chris smiled.

We climbed the stairs to my room, opened the door and found a bed sheet with brown with orange and gold flowers.

"I'm sure they'll loan them to us. We can offer to have them cleaned when we bring them back!" Chris said enthusiastically.

"These will be great Chris ... good thinking!"

Chris's sleeping bag arrived that afternoon. We had already gotten a week's worth of food and fuel (that was basically all my pack could hold). We finished packing that evening and were on our way to the Border Range before dawn the next morning.

As we drove out there, we were treated with the sight of a beautiful sunrise over the Border Range. I would have enjoyed it more if I wasn't so nervous. We parked the truck a couple of miles before the end of the road at a small turn-out. This time I wasn't taking any chances. Chris and I had a great time piling leaves and branches over the bedspread that was covering the truck. There were so many leaves we even wound up piling leaves on each other!

My pack was so heavy Chris had to help me lift it. She carried a smaller pack with her clothes inside of it and a foam pad and her new sleeping bag strapped on the outside.

We had barely walked past the first large yellow "No Trespassing" sign when we heard a loud truck coming rapidly up the gravel road behind us. We ran and jumped off the downhill side of the road just as the truck came flying past. There was a sign on the side of the truck that read "Mountain Mining."

Chris whispered breathlessly, "I don't think they saw us." I was too scared to say anything.

Having learned that walking up the gravel road wasn't such a good idea, we decided to get off the road and stay closer to the main stream. We found a game trail that led up the hill. The going was a little slower... but I felt a lot better; and the scenery, the waterfalls the big, ancient trees and the wildlife (mostly birds and squirrels) made up for it. In fact, it was a striking contrast to the clear cut only a few hundred yards away.

We had been climbing for several hours and had just reached a small clearing at the base of a large waterfall when Chris asked, "How much further?"

"It's still a ways," I replied, not wanting to deflate her spirits because it was really still a long ways. Instead I suggested, "This is a nice place for a break. Why don't we stop for lunch?"

"Great idea!" Chris smiled.

During lunch, two deer walked through the clearing. We sat quietly and watched them drink from a small pool at the base of the waterfall.

After lunch, Chris helped me get my pack back on and we continued up the ravine. The terrain became a lot steeper now.

As we approached the ridge near where Lou's cabin used to be, we began to hear a constant rumble of helicopters. At one point, a helicopter flew rapidly almost right over our heads. From then on, we tried to stay under the thickest trees as much as possible.

Shortly before dark we reached the small knoll above the cabin. The helicopters had left about an hour earlier, but we were still traveling pretty slow. Our reduced pace was partly due to the brush and fatigue, but mostly it was because we didn't want to accidentally run into our "friends" from Mountain Mining. I was also using a stick to test the ground in front of us so we wouldn't fall into one of Lou's bear traps.

The knoll above the cabin had an unobstructed view of the snowy white glacier and the Border Range Mountains just above us. So we set up camp in a clump of trees just below the knoll and on the opposite side of the ridge from the glacier and the cabin. Next to this clump of trees was a small stream coming off a snowfield which enabled us to get water without hiking too far from our tent.

We pitched our gray tent and then strung out the other bedspread, like a tarp, over the top of the tent. We used some cord to keep the bedspread in place by attaching the cord to a couple of trees. We eventually got the cord rigged so that our shelter wouldn't flap in the wind.

Because we were near timberline, we had a harder time finding leaves to put over the bedspread and help further camouflage our camp. It dawned on me that the evergreen trees here at Timberline don't have leaves. Fortunately, there were lots of huckleberry bushes just below our camp and a few dead branches near the stream. Chris did a great job of gathering brush and camouflaging our tent as I was too exhausted to be of much help. By the time it was dark, you could hardly tell there was a tent there ... even if you were looking right at it. We were both now so tired we didn't even bother cooking dinner. Instead, we just ate a couple of muffins in our sleeping bags and promptly fell sound asleep, listening to our small stream and the "hooting" of an old owl who kept watch over our camp from somewhere nearby.

The next morning we were awakened suddenly by the roar of helicopters coming over the ridge. We couldn't tell how many there were, but it seemed like they were circling right above us!

"Had they discovered our camp already?" I worried to myself. The choppers landed not far from us as I wondered, "How did they find us so quickly?" Then I thought, "Of course - Infrared Heat Detectors!"

As it turned out, their nearby landing had been merely a coincidence. Then, to our great relief, the helicopters and their crew left about 4 p.m. and we were again alone in the quiet wilderness.

Lou in his letter had said the Snow Birds flew only at night. So together we came up with a plan. While one of us slept, the other would climb up to the top of the knoll with the camera and watch. Half way through the night, we'd switch places. During the day, we both stayed hidden in our shelter and slept (as best we could) while the helicopters flew above us.

We had agreed not to say a word during the day, just in case someone with the mining company was nearby. So, in addition to sleeping, we spend a large part of each day reading books we had brought up with us. I read a book called "The Wilderness World of John Muir" and Chris read a paperback entitled "Watership Down." In response to my question, Chris whispered "it's a story about a bunch of homeless rabbits whose brier patch was wiped out by a bulldozer."

One night, while it was my "shift" and I was sitting up on the knoll, I must have dozed off ... because I was awakened suddenly by a hand grabbing my shoulder. My heart stopped and I jumped up. I was relieved to find it was only Chris, coming up a little early to take my place at our "observation" rock. Since I was now wide awake, we sat there together looking out at the dark mountains. Chris said, "I read once that bird watching is the most popular sport in America ... and I'm glad so many people like to watch birds ... but it's really hard to sit here night after night and not see anything."

* * *

We had been there nearly a week. Our food was almost gone, and we had not seen a single Snow Bird. I was beginning to feel pretty down about our prospects ... but Chris wanted to keep trying. So we left our tent in place and went back to town for showers and to get some more food.

This time we packed up over two weeks of food. Since I didn't have to carry up a tent or sleeping bag, there was more room in my pack and the food was basically the only thing in it. Chris also filled her daypack with food. Then we headed back to our camp in the High Country.

On the hike back in, I told Chris this was it. When this food supply was gone, I would be ready to call it quits. Chris quietly agreed to my deadline, but I could tell she wasn't happy about it.

Several more sleepy days and sleepless nights went by. I was beginning to think maybe Lou had made up the story about the Snow Birds. Maybe he had simply been in the mountains too long and his mind had played tricks on him. Even if the Snow Birds has existed, perhaps they had been scared away by all the helicopters. "Or even worse," I told Chris, "maybe we're just too late and the Snow Birds have already been wiped out by the mining operation."

Chris said nothing. She continued to hope they might still be out here. She refused to even consider such terrible possibilities. Still, we had been there nearly a month and had seen nothing but helicopters.

Chris was an extremely nice person but she was also quite stubborn. When she put her foot down, there was no use trying to change her mind. I should confess that, up to this point in the story, I have refrained as much as possible from describing either her or my relationship with her. This reluctance was not so much because it wasn't important to do so until now, but rather because I am by nature a very shy person. I have a hard time just thinking about such personal matters as love and romance, much less trying to describe them to others in public. Nevertheless, I promised to tell you the truth about what happened and so now the whole truth you shall have.

By the time we took our trip to the Border Range, I had known Chris for about a year, having met her the previous fall semester back at college. Like many biology majors, I had been given a part-time job as a lab assistant for the basic biology course. This was a very large class with over 100 students in it during the lecture periods. But for the laboratory sections, it was broken down into ten groups of about 10 students. Chris, who was a sophomore at the time and majoring in nursing, had taken the class because it was required by her major. As luck would have it, she was assigned to the lab group I was assisting.

Science was not Chris's strong point so I eventually wound up helping her prepare for her exams and showing her how to do the research needed for writing a paper required by the course. Chris had quite appropriately chosen the topic "Why we should save Endangered Species." Her paper was a good one, although Chris – being rather critical of herself – didn't see it that way.

In a very courageous moment, I asked Chris if she would like to go out with me to a football game our school was playing one weekend. She said she would and so we did. Chris was quite a funny person. Although our team lost the game, Chris kept me laughing the entire time. Our team was called the "Cougars" and at one point Chris commented that there were probably more fake cougars in the stadium than there were real cougars left out in the wild.

What I now know about love is almost entirely due to Chris. I had never met such a warm, kind hearted and gentle spirit. But while my love for her grew in leaps and bounds, our relationship was at best an awkward one. This was mostly my fault because, as I have already said, I am rather shy. I had never really dated anyone before meeting her and I was constantly at a loss for the proper way to go about it.

My fear of relationships may have been due in part to the fact that my parents fought a lot when I was little. They wound up getting divorced before I was ten. I could see at the time that they still loved each other. Unfortunately, they simply did not know how to get along and how to resolve their differences peacefully. So instead, since both of them were strong willed, they simply fought; which of course resolved nothing and only led to bitterness and resentment. Having witnessed the futility of these disputes, I grew up adverse to fighting or conflicts of any sort. This feeling extended to internal conflicts as well. Rather than taking chances, I almost always chose the safest route out of problems. Of course the safest way to deal with girls was to avoid them completely, – which is exactly what I did before I met Chris.

During my sophomore year, my father died. He was only in his late thirties, but he had smoked cigarettes since he was a teenager. He died from lung cancer. It was a slow agonizing death which went on for months. The anger I felt toward the cigarette companies that killed him was only exceeded by my new feelings of responsibility toward him. From the time of his death, I have felt like I was living my life for both of us. It was as if I now had my dad inside of me and he was living his life through me.

I was consciously aware that going to college was not only a major step for me, but also for my whole family. I had grown up out in the sticks of rural America and, being from a family of poor Norwegian immigrants, I was the first person in our entire family history to ever go to college.

My great grandfather had been a farmer in South Dakota after immigrating from Norway in the 1920s. My grandfather had moved out west and worked as an iron worker, making the iron framework for several of the dams that were built along the Columbia River in the 1950s. My father followed in his footsteps and welded steel structures for office buildings. I grew up out in the sticks because my mom, who had grown up on a farm, couldn't stand living in town. My father was very smart. Though he lacked proper schooling, he had once taught himself calculus from a library book. He proudly saw my college enrollment as the fulfillment of his own lifelong dream. I, in turn, was glad he lived long enough to see it. I hoped my getting good grades in some way eased the pain of the cancer he was enduring at the time. Since my grandfather had died many years earlier (also from smoking cigarettes), I was now the oldest living male in my family – even though I was not yet twenty. So perhaps my lack of male role models was also partly to blame for my insecurity in relationships.

Regardless of the reason, my relationship with Chris was affectionate, but in no way could it be described as passionate. We spent a lot of time together studying and, because of Chris, we also attended a lot of protest rallies and environmental meetings (learning about wolves and grizzly bears and whales and things like that). In a very short time, Chris had become my whole reason for living. Not only did I love her, but I loved to be with her. I loved listening to her stories and hearing her wonderful, if sometimes overly sensitive viewpoint on life.

Whether she loved me in return, I really can't say. To my mind that made no difference in how I felt about her. It was her I loved, not her feelings toward me. I loved her thoughts, her words and her deeds. While many people say they care about wildlife and the environment, the truth is that most people never really do anything about it. With Chris, it was just the opposite. Her every day and every dollar was devoted to her cause. So what did it matter how she felt about me? Perhaps I reasoned that anyone who could find so much to love about grizzly bears would surely find an equal amount that was good enough to love in me. But, as it turned out, we were both so busy trying to do what we were doing that I never really thought about any of these personal issues until much later – and of course by then it was too late.

So, now that you know more about Chris and myself, we can return to our mountain vigil. After weeks of waiting and seeing nothing, it started to snow. The snowfall continued for two days. By now, we were running low on food and fuel ... and I was running low on patience. We would have to leave soon; but Chris kept saying, "Please, Dave - just a couple more days."

One night, just after it stopped snowing, I was sound asleep when I was awakened suddenly by the crackling of branches outside the tent. I looked at my watch and realized that it could not be Chris - her shift would not be up for another couple of hours yet. I worried ... was it a bear? ... Or worse? I remained very still.

Then there was a flashlight shining right at the tent. "Not a bear," I thought grimly. Suddenly, the flap of the tent flew open ... and it was Chris!

"You're back early..." I said with relief. "You want me to take over?"

"Dave - come quick! Hurry! I think I see them!" Chris whispered urgently.

"Really?" I could hardly believe it. Was I dreaming?

"Really! I saw some small glowing lights high up on the mountain ... Hurry!"

We both ran back up to the knoll; and there they were – a whole flock of small shimmering lights circling high up around the highest mountain.

"There are Snow Birds!" I whispered. Chris watched them with tears in her eyes. I gave Chris a hug and said, "We did it!"

We could see them clearly in the moonlight. As we watched them fly about the mountain top, I thanked Chris for talking me into staying.

Chris tried to take some pictures of them, but they were still too far away to show up in her camera lens (even though we could see them clearly with our eyes). So she put her camera away and we just sat there and watched them.

There we were ... two people sitting on a large flat rock at the top of a hill ... in the moonlight ... arm in arm ... watching the Snow Birds circle their mountain. As we sat on that rock, I heard Chris whisper, "There's no birds like Snow Birds."



Two Bird Watchers Sitting in the Moonlight

The next morning, when we were back in our tent, Chris said she wanted to try to get closer so that she could get a better picture.

"But, Chris," I protested, "if we go up any higher, the helicopters will spot us for sure."

"No, they won't." Chris replied confidently, "We'll sleep today and leave just before dark. Those helicopters are always gone by 5 o'clock. We'll bring a light day pack and climb up the glacier. We can get our pictures and be back in the tent before dawn."

So at 5 p.m., in fading light, we headed up the hill and onto the glacier. The climbing was easy in the soft snow. I was in the lead, carrying the pack and kicking firm steps in the snow for Chris, whose boots weren't quite as good as mine. We were both using sticks to help us with our balance as we ascended.

Chris's plan was working! Slowly but surely we climbed higher and higher ... and got closer and closer to the high mountain the Snow Birds had circled above the night before. The sun had gone down a couple of hours earlier and even though we had brought flashlights, we didn't really need to use them. As it turned out, the moon was rising, and we could see perfectly well just from the moonlight reflecting off of the snow. Then, about 11 p.m. ... there they were! The Snow Birds began to circle the mountain just ahead of and above us! I practically started running trying to get closer!

Suddenly, without any warning, it happened. The snow collapsed beneath my feet ... I was falling! I screamed, "CHRIS!" and then I fell ... for what seemed like forever. When I finally hit bottom, my feet smashed through a layer of soft snow ... and then hit something very hard. I could tell just from the sound of it, that my right leg was broken. I was completely stuck. I couldn't move. Looking up, I could see the hole I'd fallen through, perhaps 30 or 40 feet above me. "It might just as well have been a thousand feet." I thought. I was in a large cavern with vertical walls of ice on all sides. "Another bear trap?" I wondered. Then I suddenly realized that I had fallen into a hidden crevasse ... and that Chris might easily fall in too! I could see the light from Chris' flashlight approaching the hole and I shouted: "CHRIS ... STAY BACK ... IT'S A CREVASSE!"

I could barely hear her as she asked, "Dave, are you all right?"

"I THINK MY LEG IS BROKEN!" I shouted up, now starting to feel the pain of it for the first time.

"Can you climb out?" Chris inquired hopefully.

"NO!" I shouted, angry at the situation I was in. "I'M STUCK!"

"Dave ... " I could hear fear in her voice now, "what are we going to do?"

I was beginning to feel the biting cold of being surrounded by ice. For the first time, I realized that I might not live. Somehow, it didn't seem to matter. Not even the Snow Birds mattered any more. All I could think about was saving Chris. I feared if she tried to come after me, we would both die. So I "lied" as best as I could ... and tried to hide the shivering that was already well on the way to doing me in. "I'LL BE OKAY, CHRIS! ... I WANT YOU TO GO BACK TO TOWN AND GET HELP!"

I knew there was no way she could get help and get back here in time to do me any good ... but at least that would keep Chris from falling in this crevasse. I thought to myself that I could die in peace as long as I knew Chris would still be alive.

"I'M GOING FOR HELP!" I heard her shout. Even from down in the crevasse, I could hear the fear in her voice as she said, "DON'T GIVE UP, DAVE ... I LOVE YOU!"

"I LOVE YOU TOO, CHRIS!" I shouted back up.

Then she was gone ... and tears of sadness came from my eyes; not so much because I was dying, but more because I was just beginning to realize how much I would miss Chris.

I would miss her laughter and her love for life ... and her passion for protecting ancient forests and Endangered Species. I thought to myself "May God bless and guide you Chris ... You've been a good and true friend."

I sat there wishing somehow I could get out of this, but I knew there was no hope. "How long does it take to die from 'hypothermia' in the snow?" I thought to myself, "Oh, yes ... three hours." As the snow fell lightly from the large opening above me and covered me in a thin layer of ice, I looked at my watch. What time was it? ... 11:37 p.m. What time did Chris leave? Ten minutes ago? Thirty minutes? It was hard to say. My brain was already being affected by the cold.

I started shivering.

"Let's see," I thought, "If she ran down the hill, it would take her an hour to reach our tent ... and at least two hours more to reach the truck ... and yet another hour to reach town. Even if she found someone right away, it would take them at least an hour to drive back. Then climbing back up that hill - that would be the problem! It's so much slower going up a hill than down it. Even without a pack, it would take Chris 4 or 5 hours to climb up that hill.... And if they were wearing packs, well, ... it wouldn't make any difference. It would be after dawn by the time they got here ... and by then I'd be gone. Only three hours left," I thought, "so little time."

The thought came to me that I should at least try to live as long as I could. I had some clothing in my pack. So after some struggling, I managed to get my pack off... and put on my jacket and a hat. But I was still very cold.

"Now, if I could only get my legs out of these cement holes ... " But it hurt too much to move my right leg. So I started kicking with my good left leg and, somehow, created enough space to free it.

After a lot of painful effort, I also succeeded in pulling my right leg out of its hole. The leg was numb from being packed in ice for so long, but the dull constant pain was still almost overwhelming.

I eventually was able to pull my rain pants up over my legs. Then I put my pack underneath me in order to get myself up off the snow. This was a little better, but I was still shivering uncontrollably. I could feel the warmth being rapidly pulled out of my body by the dense cold air that surrounded me. I wondered what I should do next. I was so cold I could now barely even think.

"Eat a candy bar," my sluggish brain told me. I struggled with the frozen zipper on the top pocket of my pack and eventually succeeded in getting it open and finding a candy bar inside. It was while I was trying to eat that half-frozen candy bar that I saw something - what was it?

Not ten feet from me, the snow was glowing ... definitely glowing. "But it can't be," I thought. "Am I losing my mind already?"

Crawling toward the glowing snow to get a closer look, I took my hand and carefully brushed away the snow where the glowing was coming from. It was a feather ... not just any feather, but a glowing feather ... A SNOW BIRD FEATHER! I had found a Snow Bird feather! This was the proof we needed! I held the precious feather in my hand and watched it glow. It glowed so brightly that it lit up not only my hand but also the entire ice cavern around me. Looking at the glowing feather brought a warm feeling to my heart. I was so fascinated by my new-found treasure that, for a moment, I completely forgot about the dire predicament I was in. Then I looked around and remembered. Soon, the feelings of coldness and hopelessness returned.

What to do? My brain slowly thought the words: "PUT THE FEATHER IN YOUR POCKET." Of course. That way, if they ever find my body, they'll also find the Snow Bird feather. I put the glowing feather in my pocket and crawled back to my pack. Now I wished even more that I could live ... so I could tell this story. The snow eventually stopped falling through the roof of the crevasse.

I could see the reflection of moonlight on the crevasse walls above me. I wondered, "Were the Snow Birds still out flying tonight? Would anyone ever find the feather in my pocket? Would Chris come back and take that picture Doc Hazelwood needed?" I sure hoped so. I felt so very, very cold.

My mind slowly drifted back to happier times. I thought about the day I first noticed Chris. As I explained earlier, I was a Lab Assistant for her biology class. One day, while I was supervising a frog dissection experiment, this student came up to me saying she wasn't going to dissect her frog. She protested that frogs had never done anything to harm us humans and insisted that the whole experiment was cruel and unusual punishment.. Then she asked me how would I feel if someone started dissecting me.

By the time she finally finished her protest, I felt like someone had dissected me. I tried to explain that I was just an Assistant and that this was my job. She said she'd rather drop the course than do something so inhumane. I told her that I would talk to the professor and see if he would accept an alternate assignment.

As my mind returned to the cold reality of the snow around me, tears came to my eyes. I was sad, not because of that memory of Chris, but rather because I had never told her how much I admired and respected her for what she did that day. It takes a lot of courage to stand up for what you believe in. I never told Chris this, but I thought she was the most courageous person I had ever met. Now, I would never get a chance to tell her. Still, I tried to remember the good times we had shared together; the football games, the day hikes, the ski trips, flower shows, and of course the protest rallies. I smiled as I remembered Chris and I playing with the leaves a few weeks earlier and sitting together watching the Snow Birds. Had it been just yesterday? I had known her only a few months, but they were the happiest months of my life.

Thinking that I would never see Chris again brought tears to my eyes. Tears which quickly froze as they fell down my cheeks.

As I got colder and colder, I could remember less and less. I was now completely covered in a layer of snow and ice. How long had it been? Time no longer seemed to have any meaning. My hands and face felt frozen ... and after a while, my shivering stopped. I felt like sleeping ... It wouldn't be long now.

Then there were dreams of glowing Snow Birds ... They danced in a circle around me like Indians doing a magical Ghost Dance.

They laughed as they danced and chanted,

" He does not know the prophesy,
He cannot see his destiny,
He cannot hear, he has no ears,
Only tears that come from frozen fears!"

Then the Snow Birds turned to snow crystals floating slowly in the air around me. Finally there was just whiteness.

"Snow Birds must like the cold," my mind wandered.

Yes ... there they are ... see the glowing?

They've come for me ...

Some bright lights ... and then more.

Suddenly the crevasse was filled with shimmering light ... like a thousand glowing Snow Birds ... glowing like angels ... coming to take me to Heaven.

"Are Snow Birds really angels?" I wondered.

As the light grew brighter, there was a thunderous roaring sound and an incredible wind blowing snow all around me.

Then I heard a deep loud voice....The words echoed off the walls of the crevasse and became all jumbled together. Was it the voice of God? If it was, I knew I better listen. So, although I had no ears I tried hard to understand what the voice was saying...

"PUT SOME HOPE...OPE....OPE....AROUND YOU...YOU...YOU!"

My mind was numb and dazed by all the commotion.... "Hope," I thought. I could barely remember what that word meant.

Then I saw a strange looking rope ... right in front of me.

The voice called even louder as it echoed off the cavern walls,

"PUT THE ROPE.... OPE....OPE....AROUND YOU...YOU...YOU!"

I was confused. Was it hope or rope?

Maybe it was both.

I slowly lifted my arms and put the rope around my shoulders ... and I felt a tremendous pull as my body was jerked up awkward.

Suddenly I could see the mountains again. I was back on top of the glacier!

People were wrapping me in blankets.

Then Chris came running up. She was hugging me and saying, "Thank God you're still alive ... I was so worried we wouldn't find you."

Then I thought, "The feather ... show her the feather."

I tried to pull the feather out of my coat pocket and show it to her ... but my hand was numb and I had trouble getting it out. My lips were frozen and all I could say was "Snow Birrr".

Chris looked at me with tears in her eyes and said, "David, I don't care about the Snow Birds anymore ... I'm just glad you're alive!"

I felt myself being loaded onto a stretcher and tied in with more ropes. I hear the roar of a helicopter passing above me.

Suddenly I'm gripped with fear. "Not a helicopter," I think (afraid it was Mountain Mining); but then I see the sign on the side of the helicopter: "Salmon County Search and Rescue" ... and I think with relief, "I guess even the good guys have helicopters."

In moments, I was being lifted into the air. As I was pulled into the helicopter and just before I passed out, the last thing I remembered thinking was, "Hang onto that feather!"

* * *

The next thing I remember was waking up in a warm dimly lit room. I lifted up my hand ... but the glowing feather was gone!

PART THREE

WINTER



*As days grew shorter
And winter winds blew
A dark cloud descended
On all that I knew.*

*From strangers around me
To a friend far away
In a city of stone
There was nothing to say.*

*Still as I looked with my heart
Toward a mountain of snow
I saw a glimmer of hope
In a feather that glowed.*

Chapter Nine ... The Ice Man and his Feather

*Our white brothers view medicine as that which makes you well.
However, our medicine is more powerful
because it is that which keeps you from becoming ill...*

White Bird

The day was warm and sunny. Outside my window I could see a brilliant blue sky ... and the Space Needle. "Seattle," I thought, "I'm in Seattle. How'd I get here?" I should have been happy, but I wasn't. I had lost the glowing feather. After all I had gone through, to come so close. Now the past didn't seem real any more. Had any of it really happened? My mind and body felt groggy, like I was waking from an immensely long dream (or more accurately from an immensely long nightmare).

Laying in a warm bed, my thoughts drifted back to the crevasse. "Perhaps there never was a feather," I wondered. And what about the dancing Snow Birds and the Indian Ghost Dance. Could I have been hallucinating the whole time?

A middle-aged black nurse in a light blue suit came into the room and smiled. "Well, you're finally awake!" She spoke with a warm encouraging voice. "We were beginning to wonder if you'd ever wake up."

"How long?" My vocal cords were still having a hard time forming words and sentences ...

"Let's see," she pondered, "you came in during one of my days off ... so, that would make it nearly a week now. But we knew you'd come around eventually. Your vital signs have been improving every day. You were moved here from intensive care three days ago. Why, I'd say you're in as good a shape as I am." Then she laughed and added, "Now that I think of it, you've definitely been getting more sleep than me."

She reached for my wrist and took my pulse. As she looked at her watch, I could see her shiny white name tag. In blue letters, it read "Rachel Carson, R.N." Then she got out something and wrapped it around my arm. She pumped it up and it squeezed my arm tightly ... "Not bad," she commented as she wrote some notes on a clipboard. She started to walk out of the room and said, still with a smile, "The doctor will be by to check on you in a bit."

"Please," I said slowly, "I had a feather in my hand ... "

"A feather?" she laughed. "Well, I'm sure they'd throw something like that away. Why a thing like that would be filled with bacteria. Can't have that in a hospital now, can we?"

She could see I was upset so she added, "Of course, if they did save it, it would be in that drawer beside your bed. That's where they put anything personal that might have been on you when you arrived, stuff like watches and rings and such. Would you like me to check your drawer for you?"

I nodded as best I could and she walked to the small table beside my bed and pulled out a drawer underneath it. "Well, what do you know," she said with a smile, "there is a feather in here. A pretty white one. What is it? Your good luck piece or something?"

She pulled out a white feather and held it gently in her hands. "You know," she said seriously, "I really shouldn't let you keep this."

Then she added quietly, "But I guess it wouldn't hurt ... "

She set the feather down on the table and looked at it for a moment. "Tell you what, Mr. Spring," she smiled, "I'm going to pretend I didn't see this. Lucky for you it's white. Why, it blends in nicely with this white table top. No wonder I couldn't see it!"

I smiled and said, "Thank you, Ms. Carson."

She laughed and said, "You're welcome, Mr. Spring."

As she left, I looked at the feather. "An ordinary white feather," I thought. "No glowing at all." I wondered, "Had it ever glowed, or did I only imagine it?" It hardly mattered now. No one would pay any attention to a feather like that.

The Doctor came in and said, "I heard you had come to ... " He was a young looking Oriental fellow. As he studied my chart I realized he could not have been more than a few years older than me. After he finished reading the chart, he smiled and said, "Looks like you're coming along nicely."

Next he held up his stethoscope and listened to my heart. "Sounds just fine."

He then pulled a small flashlight out of his shirt pocket and shined it in each of my eyes as he looked real close through a kind of magnifying eye-glass piece. "A little damage," he said, "but not bad ... considering what you've been through."

"Mr. Spring," he said seriously as he put away the flashlight and eye-glass, "You're lucky to be alive. Your core temperature was in the low 80's when they flew you in here. Just a few years ago, we might not have been able to save you. But we've learned a lot about treating hypothermia victims recently ... still learning actually. In fact," he smiled, "you're one of our biggest success stories! How do you feel?"

"Groggy," was all I could think of ... I still felt like I had cobwebs in my brain.

"I'll be back to check on you in a day or two, but it looks to me like you're going to be just fine."

The Doctor had only been gone briefly when the door opened again. It was Chris. She was holding a card and some flowers ... and she was crying.

I started to cry too. "Chris," I said, "you did it ... you saved me!"

"David," she cried, "I don't ever want to go through that again. I was so scared. I was afraid we wouldn't make it back in time and ... I'm just so glad you're alive."

Chris came over and held me as she sobbed. I put my arm around her and said, "It's okay Chris ... I understand. Everything's going to be okay now."

After a while, Chris sat up and reached for a tissue paper from the box on the table beside my bed.

"What's this?" she asked, as she picked up the feather and looked at it.

"It's a feather. I found it in the crevasse. I thought it was a Snow Bird feather. I thought that it glowed, but I must have just been delirious from the cold."

Chris set the feather back down and said, "David, I don't ever want to talk about those Snow Birds again. Let someone else save them. I'm not cut out for that kind of stuff. I thought you were gonna die!"

She started to cry again, so I held her, saying, "It's okay, Chris ... it's going to be okay now."

After a while, she sat up and said, "They say you have a broken leg ... does it hurt?"

I hadn't even thought about my leg. I tried to move it, but it wouldn't budge.

"I think it's in a cast," I said, "but it doesn't really hurt."

We talked for a few minutes and she gave me a get-well card. She said it was from her and Dr. Hazelwood. "He was really worried about you."

She seemed nervous ... so I asked her, "What is it?"

She said, "Well, there's a reporter out there. He's from the Seattle Times ... and he wants to interview you. I told him about our camping trip, but I didn't say anything about the Snow Birds. I didn't know if it would be a good idea so – anyway, he really wants to talk with you and he's waiting outside. Would you want to talk with him for a couple of minutes?"

"Sure," I said. "Send him in."

"I'll be back tomorrow," Chris said as she wiped the tears from her eyes with tissue paper. "You rest and get well, okay?" Then she looked at me and said, "I love you."

I gave her a hug and said, "I love you too, Chris."

She left and moments later, a large black fellow dressed in a ruffled suit and wearing wire-rimmed glasses walked in. "Hello, Dave. My name is Donnie Walker and this is my camera man, Tony." Donnie held out his hand and I held out mine. I could tell from his handshake that he was an extremely strong man.

Mr. Walker continued, "I do human interest stories for the Times. There seems to be quite a bit of interest in you right now. I did a story about you when you first arrived. I called it, 'Ice Man Is Rescued!' He smiled then continued. "Now my editor wants me to do a follow-up. Do you mind if Tony here gets a couple of pictures?"

I smiled meekly and said, "Sure ... go ahead."

While Tony was taking pictures, Donnie continued, "So Dave, could you tell me in your own words what happened out there?"

I still wasn't thinking too clearly, but I tried to recall the jumbled events. I took a deep breath and said, "Well, we were climbing a glacier ... and I fell in a crevasse. It was very cold ... Chris went for help ... I remember being pulled out by a rope ... and a search and rescue helicopter ... Then I woke up here in the hospital. I don't even know how I got here."

"I see," he said. "Well, I can fill you in on that. You were flown here by a group called Airlift Northwest. They brought you here because this hospital has a unit specializing in hypothermia recovery. They said you're lucky to even be alive. So tell me Dave, how do you feel right now?"

"Groggy," I said again, still not knowing what else to say. "My brain feels like mush."

Donnie smiled and said, "Well, Dave, I won't keep you any longer. I've got to run if I'm going to meet my press deadline. Thanks for the story. It's been good talking with you."

I must have been tired because after the reporter left I fell sound asleep.

When I woke up again, it was very quiet ... and very dark. I looked around ... and there on the table was the feather ... only it was glowing again; not as much as in the crevasse ... but definitely glowing. "Was I dreaming?" I wondered. Then it hit me ... "Maybe it only glows in the dark! But how could that be?"

I picked up the feather and held it gently in the palm of my hand. It WAS a Snow Bird feather!

It was so small and delicate. Yet it had a mysterious power like a sacred gift from another world.

Despite the fog in my head, there were still many questions... Why did it glow? How did it get in the crevasse? For that matter why did I land in the crevasse right next to it? Perhaps it was all just a coincidence. But I couldn't help but feel like there was something more going on. I had been drawn to that feather like a flower is drawn to the sun. But why?

I thought about what the reporter had called me, "The Iceman". I realized I had been the Iceman long before I fell in the crevasse. No ears, no eyes, no heart. But holding that feather, I could feel the ice begin to melt. I fell back asleep still holding that feather in my hand.

Chapter Ten ... The Salmon Savers

*And now here is my secret, a very simple secret:
It is only with the heart that one can see rightly;
What is essential is invisible to the naked eye.
Antoine de Saint Exupery, The Little Prince*

The next day, when Chris came by, I could hardly wait to tell her: "Chris ... listen ... that feather ... it IS a Snow Bird feather!"

"Dave," Chris said with a note of chagrin, "it's just a white feather."

"No," I insisted, "last night, in the dark, I saw it glow. Honest!"

"But it's not glowing now." Chris protested.

"It doesn't glow in the daylight," I explained. "It has to be dark."

"Dave, maybe you were just dreaming."

"Believe me, Chris, I saw it. Listen. I have an idea. Why don't you close those curtains and turn off the lights for a few minutes?"

Chris reluctantly did as I asked. The room got darker, but there was still some light coming through and around the curtains.

Chris sat in the chair beside my bed and looked away from me and toward the curtains. I could tell she was upset.

"What's wrong, Chris?" I asked apologetically.

"It's just this Snow Bird thing, Dave," she sighed heavily. "You have no idea what I went through; running the entire way down that hill, trying to get that damn truck started, begging the Sheriff to call for the rescue helicopter, trying to find you."

Chris looked up to the ceiling and then continued, "The mountains all looked so different up in the air than they did on the ground ... I could hardly recognize anything!" She started to sob but went on, "I didn't think I could find you!"

Chris reached for some tissue paper and paused to wipe a tear from her eye, "Then to see you here in the hospital with all those tubes stuck in you. They told me you might not live! Can't you see Dave – I can't take it anymore. It's just too much for me."

"Come here Chris," I tried to console her, "I'm sorry. You're right. I had no idea." I held her as she cried.

All I could think of to comfort her was "It's okay. It's okay now. Everything is going to be okay."

* * *

The feather never glowed again; not on that day or any other day. To make matters worse, within a week, Chris was saying that maybe there never were any Snow Birds. She said that maybe it was just the "Northern Lights" we saw glowing that night.

Then one day, when Chris came to visit, I lost my patience. I was angry at her pessimism as I said sternly, "Chris, you can't really believe those were just the Northern Lights circling over that mountain."

Chris replied with a note of fatigue, "David, I don't know what to believe. All I know is I can't take it anymore."

With that, Chris walked out – just as Nurse Carson came walking in. She could tell I was upset, but she just quietly looked at the x-rays on the chart beside my bed. Then, after a couple of minutes, she smiled and trying to cheer me up, she said, "Your leg is healing nicely. We should be able to remove your cast in a day or two."

I replied sarcastically, "My leg may be healed, but now it's my heart that's broken."

Nurse Carson exclaimed with a note of frustration, "What is with you two? For friends, you sure aren't acting very friendly."

I explained to her, as best I could, about the Snow Birds and the glowing feather. I told her about what Chris had gone through in rescuing me. I ended by saying, "I guess she just doesn't want to deal with it anymore. It seems like her way of handling the problem is to run away from it."

Nurse Carson said, "Mr. Spring ... can I call you Dave?"

I nodded and she continued, "Fine, by the way, my name is Rachel. Now like I was saying, Dave ... you seem like a nice person ... but you obviously have a lot to learn about people."

She paused and then smiled as she said, "Listen, I have some friends I'd like you to meet. It's sort of a club actually. In a couple of days - when you get your cast off - how about if you join me and we'll go visit them."

At first I balked at the idea, saying, "I don't know. I'm not much into socializing."

Rachel kept smiling and said, "Well, you don't have to say much. These friends of mine would still like to meet you. After all those articles in the paper about you, you're quite a celebrity - I mean what with you being the Iceman and all. What do you say? It'll just be for an hour. Besides, it'll do you some good to get out of this room for a while."

The last part appealed to me. So I reluctantly agreed.

* * *

Two days later my cast was removed and that afternoon Rachel showed up with a wheelchair (my leg still being too weak to actually walk on). She made sure that I put on a warm coat and then wheeled me to the elevator. Inside the elevator, she pushed the button for the basement and then said, with a note of excitement, "I've already told them you were coming. They're all quite elated."

"Who," I asked, "are they?"

"They are a club called 'The Salmon Savers'. They came up with the name themselves and I am very proud of all of them."

The elevator door opened and Rachel wheeled me down a very long barren hallway as she continued, "I'm sure you're aware that many types of salmon are on the verge of extinction. Well, my friends are trying to do something to help the remaining salmon survive."

Just then, we reached a door at the end of a hallway. Rachel pushed it open and said, "Kids, I'd like you to meet the Iceman."

The large room was quite cold and poorly lit. At first, it was rather noisy, but it gradually grew still and quiet. Looking up at me was a group of about 40 children. They ranged in age from around 4 to 14. Some were holding toys. Others were reading books. Still others appeared to be painting. There were also two younger women there helping some of the children with their projects. All of the kids were clean and had their hair combed. Also, all of them were wearing old and ill-fitted heavy jackets. Except for that, and the presence of some older children, the room looked almost like any other daycare center.

For a while, there was an awkward silence. Then one of the younger boys, who was wearing a jacket much too big for him, slowly walked up to me and asked, "Are you made of Ice?"

I smiled and said, "Not really."

Rachel laughed and said, "Bobbie has quite an imagination. Go ahead, Bobbie. It's okay. Why don't you shake his hand and see for yourself?"

I reached out my hand and smiled. Bobbie slowly extended his hand til it reached mine. It was a tiny, warm hand. Then he too smiled broadly.

A little girl came up and asked, "If you aren't made of ice, then why do they call you the Iceman?"

"Well," I said, "it's a long story."

Rachel added, "Why don't you tell them your story? I'm sure they'd love to hear it ... wouldn't you kids?"

With this, I was surrounded by several smiling kids that were saying, "Please ... please ... tell us the story!"

So I told them all about how I was a biology student who got a summer job studying gypsy moths. I described for them the miner and his gold mine and about the Snow Birds that glowed in the moonlight and about how I fell into a hole in the ice and found a glowing feather. Then I explained that I was rescued and brought here to Seattle. To my surprise, the children listened quietly and intently.

When I was finished, one of them came up to me and asked, "What's biology?"

I smiled and said, "Biology is the study of plants and animals."

Then, the child asked, "Why do you want to study plants and animals?"

"That's a good question ..." I said meekly.

Then a girl said with confidence, "I know why ... If you study plants and animals, you can learn how to help them."

"That's very good," I commended her. "You're absolutely right."

Another child asked, "Can I see the feather you found?"

I explained that I didn't have it with me right now. Rachel suggested that perhaps I could bring it to the Sing Along they were going to have on the following weekend. The kids asked, "Would you, Mr. Iceman?"

I said, "Sure. I'd be glad to."

As we left the room and headed back to the elevator, I asked Rachel if that was a daycare center for the hospital staff. Rachel laughed and said, "No, the daycare center is up on the Second floor and is much nicer... and much warmer."

I was puzzled and said, "I don't understand."

Rachel explained, "That is a shelter for homeless children. It's a volunteer project. The hospital was good enough to let us use the basement for free."

As we waited for the elevator, Rachel continued, "Those kids spend all their time there, except of course when they are in school or when we take them on a field trip."

Rachel wheeled me into the elevator as I asked, "But where are their parents?"

The door closed and, as the elevator rose, she explained, "Hopefully, you'll get to meet some of them this weekend. But they don't have homes either ... and some of the kids don't even have parents ... at least not that we know of."

The elevator door came open and Rachel wheeled me back toward my room. After we got there, I said, "It's surprising that a group of homeless kids would want to save the salmon."

"It's not surprising to me," Rachel replied rather blankly. "Those kids simply understand better than the rest of us. I think they relate to what the salmon are going through. You see, Dave, it's the same thing really ... both the salmon and those kids are in need of a home."

I thought about what she said and then commented, "I still don't see how a group of homeless kids can help save the salmon ..."

Rachel just smiled and said, "Why don't you ask them on Saturday?"

With that, she left. As I sat on my bed looking out the window, I realized that Rachel was right about one thing – I did have a lot to learn.

Chapter Eleven ... Why Feathers Stop Glowing

When one can no longer see, one can at least still know.

Rene Daumal, Mount Analog

The rest of the week, I was busy working on rehabilitating my injured leg. This involved doing muscle stretching and tensing exercises that Rachel had given to me. Occasionally, she would stop by to see how I was doing.

Meanwhile, Chris came to visit me less and less ... and we grew further and further apart. I didn't know what to say ... and neither did she.

The last time I saw her, she said, "David, can't you see? This whole thing is just too painful for me. I have to leave."

After she left, Rachel came in and asked, "Are you ready?"

At first, I didn't know what she meant. Then I realized it was Saturday and time for the Sing Along. I didn't really feel like going, but I didn't want to let the kids down; so with Rachel's help, I got my coat and the feather. As my leg still wasn't quite strong enough to walk, Rachel again wheeled me to the elevator.

She must have known I was sad and discouraged because, while we were waiting for the elevator, she said, "A while ago, I saw your friend leaving ... I take it things still aren't going very well."

I replied, "Things aren't going at all."

As we got in the elevator, Rachel said sincerely, "That's too bad. She seems like a nice person."

As the elevator door closed, I said, "She is."

Inside the shelter, I passed around the Snow Bird feather, but my heart wasn't into it. One child said, "It's not glowing ..."

I replied rather coldly, "No, it doesn't glow anymore."

The child asked, "Why doesn't it glow?"

I just shrugged my shoulders and said "I have no idea."

Rachel tried to help. Holding up her arms, she smiled and said enthusiastically, "Okay kids ... Mr. Spring here has heard about our Salmon Savers club. He wants to know how you kids help save salmon. Who wants to tell Mr. Spring how they can help save salmon?"

Several children raised their hands and Rachel said, "Danny?"

A small boy stood up and said, "We can write letters to our President and tell him we want him to save the salmon."

"That's good, Danny." Rachel smiled. As Danny sat down, Rachel asked, "Anyone else? Lisa?"

A slightly older girl stood up and said, "We can read books so we can learn more about salmon and why they are disappearing."

Rachel smiled and said, "Very good, Lisa! Okay Bobby, what can you do?"

The little boy I had met the other day stood up and said, "We can wear these coats to stay warm instead of turning on the 'lectric heaters."

Rachel asked, "How does that help the salmon?"

Bobby looked perplexed but Lisa whispered something in his ear and then he said, "Oh, yea, I knew that ... the 'lectricity comes from dams which hurt the salmon. If we use less 'lectricity, then there'll be a fewer dams to hurt the salmon."

To my embarrassment, I suddenly realized why the room was so cold and why all the children were wearing bulky old coats – it wasn't, as I had originally thought, because of their poverty; rather, it was their way of trying to help the salmon!

"That's very good, Bobby ... how about you, Thomas?"

A boy in his early teens, who was sitting by himself in the back of the room, looked up and said defiantly, "I don't want to help the salmon."

"Why not?" asked Rachel, only slightly surprised by his comment.

"Because it won't make any difference ..." Thomas held his head down as his tone changed from defiance to dejection.

Rachel tried to help him by saying, "But Thomas, you might be able to ..."

Then Thomas stood up and said, with a note of anger in his voice, "All I ever hear is the fish are dying and the frogs are dying ... Even your Mr. Spring says the glowing birds might get killed. I won't ever get to see the glowing birds. By the time I grow up, all the animals will be dead. All we'll have left is feathers. Why do all the salmon and all the birds have to be killed anyway? Why can't you adults take better care of things?"

Rachel tried to calm him down by saying, "Now, Thomas, it's not all that bad ..." However, it was too late. Thomas had already ran out the door with tears in his eyes.

Rachel ran after him, but she couldn't catch him. When she came back, she began to apologize to me for his behavior.

I just said, "That's okay ... I don't blame him."

Lisa came up to her and asked, "Why did Thomas run away?"

Rachel took the little girl's hand and answered, "Thomas ran away because he lost hope ... and he left to go look for it."

After a brief pause, Rachel added, "Listen kids, no one ever wants to run away. They just don't know what else to do. There is a story that might help you understand our friend Thomas. It's called 'The Runaway Bunny'." She then told the kids the story of a bunny who wanted to run away from home. At the end of her story, she got out her guitar and sang the children a song that was based upon the story. The song was called, "I Believe in You."

Later on that night, after Rachel returned me to my room, I found a short letter from Chris on the table by my bed. In it, she said that she couldn't see me anymore – that she was leaving the next day to go back to school.

After reading the letter, I thought about Thomas, a runaway child, lost somewhere on the streets of Seattle. I thought about glowing birds lost in the mountains of Idaho. And me, I had lost my best friend. I knew how Thomas felt – because I too was losing hope.

Looking out my window, I saw that snow was now falling on the city streets below me. Out there somewhere on that cold dark night were a couple of runaways. Both of them running away from problems too big to deal with. I wondered if things could possibly get any worse.

As I sat there on the chair and watched the slowly falling snow, I was reminded of the snow falling into the crevasse. "If only I hadn't fallen into that hole," I thought.

Then, I pulled the feather out of my coat pocket. I understood now why the feather had stopped glowing. It was because it had lost its connection to the Snow Bird. The Snow Bird was the real source of the glowing. It became painfully obvious that I was like the feather ... and Chris was my Snow Bird. Without her love and inspiration, I could no longer glow.

For a moment, I understood the desperation Chris must have felt that night on the Glacier as she was searching for me. When I finally saw it, I broke down and cried. "Oh Chris," I whispered, "I do know how you feel. I really do." I understood because this night I too was searching. Both Chris and I had fallen into a deep hole. It was the cold chill of hopelessness that now surrounded both of us. Only this time there would be no rescue helicopter to save us.

I looked at the now dull white feather and wondered, "Why did it have to happen this way? Why had the struggle been so hard? Why did life have so many bear traps?" They were all questions to which I had no answer.

Long into the night, I could hear Rachel singing that song of hers to those homeless kids ...

"So you say it's time for you to go,
Time for you to leave.
Well there's something I think you should know,
It's something I believe.

I believe in you,
And I believe it's true,
That wherever you go, my friend,
and whatever you do ...
I'll still believe in you.

The song lessened the pain. But it didn't stop the tears.

Chapter Twelve ... Absolute Zero

*There is no running away from the mountains of your life.
You either climb them or they will forever reappear
to haunt you in your dreams.*

Carl Jung

Winter in Seattle is politely referred to as the rainy season. But this winter, the rain seemed to be falling on a daily basis. It rained so hard that rivers all over the Northwest experienced record flooding. It was as if Mother Nature herself was trying to tell us something. Unfortunately, no one was listening.

I spent that entire winter in the hospital. While the bones in my right leg had long since healed, it appeared my rehabilitation would take much longer than normal. There was still a hollowness and a numbness deep inside the leg. My doctor told me this was due to nerve damage it had suffered from being frozen. He said there was also the possibility of blood clots that might still go to my heart or head and kill me.

So I would have to stay in the hospital at least another month – maybe two. They put me on blood thinners and other drugs too numerous to count. I was also subjected to weekly attacks by a large blood cleaning machine. But other than my daily physical therapy appointments and occasional visits with the Salmon Savers, I had little else to do. So I spent a lot of time reading the newspaper.

The steady drizzle outside my window seemed to be echoed by the constant rain of bad news in the papers. In December, Congress shut down the Government. While the rich members of Congress argued over how big a tax break they would give to wealthy corporations, Federal programs for feeding homeless children were completely halted. Rachel worked overtime trying to find temporary sources of food for her Salmon Savers. It was a difficult task. The newspapers said there were now over 6,000 homeless people in Seattle and almost half of the homeless were children. That winter, in Seattle alone, 138 homeless people died from hunger, exposure or despair.

The newspaper also reported that the salmon fishery in the Northwest was on the verge of collapse. For reasons which hardly anyone could understand, several species of salmon were suddenly disappearing and close to extinction. Some scientists blamed "El Nino" weather patterns while others blamed water pollution, electrical dams, clearcuts or over-fishing. But no one knew for sure what the problem really was.

Then in January, I ran across an article about the Salmon River. It explained that Mountain Mining had dumped over 20,000 gallons of a poison called cyanide into the Glacier Fork of the Salmon River. This poison was being used to extract gold from the new mine. Evidently, since it was permitted by the Mining Law of 1872, this dumping was perfectly legal. Unfortunately, the poison killed off virtually all the salmon in the river. The article said that only six salmon were left alive.

Salmon Falls was suddenly headline news, at least in environmental circles. Earth First and Sierra magazines both ran front page articles complaining about the destruction of river and wilderness habitat around Salmon Falls. There was no mention of glowing birds. The focus instead was on dying salmon and disappearing Old Growth Forests.

The Salvage Rider Logging bill that Congress had passed the previous summer had led to widespread logging of the last remaining stands of Old Growth Forest. The gypsy moth invasion was now being used as an excuse to hasten the logging of the ancient trees.

There was even a plan to log the Border Range Wilderness, despite the absence of gypsy moths. The government had decided that the old trees were a fire hazard. The fact that this was completely untrue didn't seem to matter. Congress mandated that logging was to proceed as rapidly as possible.

Scientists and environment groups protested the logging would only worsen the problems with gypsy moths, flooding, endangered species, salmon extinction, global warming and the hole in the ozone layer.

In the public forests, over a thousand people protested the "Salvage Rider" logging. Several hundred concerned citizens were arrested for "trespassing" on public forests while trying to stop the destruction. Meanwhile, the Congress in Washington D.C. voted down an attempt to repeal the "Salvage Rider." In February, the President came to Seattle and said, during a speech, that the logging of our ancient forests was "all a big mistake." Still the devastation (and protests) continued.

That winter the Pacific Northwest had not one, but two "one-hundred year" floods within a matter of months. They were the result of excessive logging combined with unusually heavy rains. The paper said it would cost taxpayers over 100 million dollars to repair the damage that had been done to roads, bridges, buildings and fish habitat. The bill for our reckless destruction of our forests was now coming due.

The dark dreary days of winter were made even colder by the clouds of confusion across the nation. There seemed to be conflicting opinions everywhere. No one was really sure exactly what was wrong much less whom to blame. Then, quite symbolically, a blizzard paralyzed the whole East Coast. The forecast in Seattle was for more rain and more bad news. Finally, I couldn't take it anymore. I stopped reading the paper altogether.

Nothing seemed to matter now. I could hardly get up the energy to leave my bed and attend my next therapy appointment. Chris had been my whole life. She was the real leader. I had simply been her follower. Without her, I was completely lost. How could I stay on the path when I lacked even the eyes to see where it was, much less where it led?

I have told my family and a few friends this story. Many of them, especially my sisters, insisted it could not have happened the way I described it. My older sister said, "No woman would ever leave the man she loved over a matter that small."

My reply at the time was, "Then perhaps Chris wasn't really in love with me."

My younger sister said, "There must have been another reason for her leaving."

I agreed with this being more likely the case since, in my heart, I believe that Chris did love me – but left anyway. As for why she left, I'm not really of much help. Unlike writers of a traditional fiction story, I don't have the luxury of making things come out in the way I want or even in a way that seems logical.

As I have said all along, I am bound to reporting this story to you exactly the way it happened – or at least the way it happened from my point of view. Surely you can understand that Chris's departure was not the outcome I would have chosen.

As for reasons, if you want to take the symbolic view of life, then perhaps it happened because that is how real life is – bad things happen sometimes without any apparent explanation. We can't always control the course of events. Quite often it is the bad events that wind up controlling us. They prevent us from realizing our potential and they hinder us from achieving our more noble goals. In the wake of these tragic moments, we are left trying to explain things that we can't explain.

Perhaps it was God who made it happen, for reasons known only to Him (or Her). I know, for example, that we have a big problem with divorces in our culture.

Maybe this was His way of saying that we should at least admit we have a problem here and ask ourselves if we, in our own lives, might not have parted with a friend or discarded a relationship over reasons almost as petty as those I have described in this story. It's like we fail to see the harm that leaving does to all involved.

I'm not saying one should never leave their partner, but it seems to me we should at least be willing to ask ourselves why this is happening ... Why do we all spend so much time running away?

Quite often the answer is that we are still trying to solve problems and conflicts with the old "fight or flight" reactions. The truth is that neither of these methods work very well. Either reaction tends to make things worse instead of better. These old barbaric "cures" eventually wind up killing both the patient and the doctor.

A counselor friend of mine called it, "Reacting to problems with our old dinosaur brains." We need to find a third way ... a way that actually makes things better. Of course, while I can reflect upon those events calmly and objectively now, during the course of that terrible winter, I was anything but calm and objective. In fact, I was extremely angry.

I constantly wondered, "Why? .. Why did it happen?" I didn't really blame Chris for leaving; or if I did, at least I could at times forgive her. I still thought of her as a kind and beautiful person struggling her best to make sense out of a difficult and even crazy world. But I did blame God. Chris and I were, after all, only human. Mistakes were bound to happen. "But God," I asked bitterly, "what was His excuse?"

Why couldn't God have moved that crevasse twenty feet to the right or left? And if moving crevasses was against some sort of "divine rules", then why couldn't He have at least given me a few more brain cells, so I could have anticipated the hazard and avoided it myself? For that matter, why did Chris and I even have to go up there? Why are we humans so bent on destroying the environment in the first place? Why didn't God give all of us a few more brain cells so we could see how dumb we were being? Even a slight improvement in intelligence could help solve a lot of problems.

Don't get me wrong. I admired the sheer brilliance of the rest of God's creation, but I wondered about His creation of humans. Was it wise to create an animal capable of destroying everything and then skimp on the brain cells? I know we're supposed to be the smartest animals out there, but sometimes it appears like we're the dumbest. Just read the papers. We seem to be getting dumber every day. Besides, all the other animals live in harmony with nature – so why in Heaven's name can't we?

And this business of greed ... where did that come from? Why can't we learn to share? We can't even get along with each other, much less with the rest of nature. Look at all these wars we keep having – they're completely ridiculous! Millions of fatalities ... and for what? Does anyone still honestly believe that killing a pile of people and blowing up whole cities will make anything better? All it does is cause more hatred, more bitterness, more resentment ... and more war!

We seem to be constantly falling victim to our own anger, fear, greed and stupidity. When are we going to learn? More importantly, why haven't we learned already?

And another thing ... why did God put that snake in the Garden of Eden? Surely He must have known it would cause nothing but trouble. And that forbidden fruit tree, what was that about? It seemed to me that it was little more than a trap, a crevasse that us dumb humans fell right in to! While we're on the subject, why did He pick that fight with one of his own angels way back then? You'd think that God would be above that sort of thing. I know we aren't suppose to question God, but I felt like these were all pretty legitimate questions. In my mind, God had a lot of explaining to do and it was high time we lowly humans started getting some answers!

My own personal conclusion was that the whole thing was entirely God's fault. It was His problem, not mine. He created this mess – let Him fix it!

I was done with it. The Snow Birds, the dying salmon ... the whole thing.

Let them mine all the gold they want. Let them fill the rivers with cyanide! Who needs a bunch of dead salmon? I was thinking about becoming a vegetarian anyway. No loss to me. The whole world could go to hell in a hand basket as far as I was concerned.

The way I saw it, we all deserved exactly what we were about to get. Dinosaur city ... here we come! So much for God's low budget experiment with humans. Maybe next time, He'll learn not to be so cheap and He'll toss in a few more brain cells.

But losing Chris ... that was another matter entirely. I couldn't stop thinking that I had somehow failed her. The pain of this burden was more than I could bear. I went through bouts of anger, sadness, bitterness and loneliness until they merged into one dark mass of despair.

Day by day, hour by hour, I sank deeper and deeper into a state of depression. Night after night, I cried myself to sleep. I cried until I couldn't possibly cry any more. I cried until there was nothing left. Eventually I passed beyond the point of tears. I was completely empty, devoid of any feelings good or bad. My heart had gone from rain to Absolute Zero.

Absolute Zero ~ the coldest anything could ever get. I had known a little about it before that winter. Hazelwood had talked about the concept one day in our Biochem class. He was discussing what is generally thought of as temperature. He explained that heat is really nothing more than the vibration or motion of molecules. It is their Kinetic (or moving) energy. Things get colder because they have lost their energy. For example, at 32 degrees Fahrenheit, water changes from liquid to ice. It does this because the water molecules have slowed down enough to permit them to come closer together. But, he explained, those molecules are still vibrating – even if just a little. Absolute Zero was the theoretical point at which all motion ceases. It was "over a hundred degrees below zero" on the Fahrenheit scale.

Hazelwood went on to explain that Absolute Zero was impossible; this owing to the fact that zero motion was impossible. He said that motion was the same as the concept of speed that we use every day. For example, if you are traveling at a speed of sixty miles per hour that is equal to a distance of 60 miles divided by a time of one hour. He wrote this as an equation on the chalkboard:

$$\text{velocity} = \frac{\text{change in distance}}{\text{change in time}} = \frac{60 \text{ miles}}{1 \text{ hour}}$$

Then he went on ... Now the only way that motion can be zero is if the distance is also zero and/or the time is infinitely long ...

$$\text{Absolute Zero} = \text{zero velocity} = \frac{\text{zero distance}}{\text{infinite time}}$$

"This is where the problem comes in," he said (I remember Hazelwood smiled at this point in his lecture), "because there is no such thing as zero distance ... Think about it for a moment, if you have zero distance, you have something smaller than the smallest point. You have nothing at all!"

"Absolute Zero," I thought, "a place where zero distance is traveled in an infinitely long period of time ... an impossible situation ... completely frozen." Absolute Zero was the perfect description of my winter of discontent.

The reporter had been only half right in that article about me. I was the Iceman – but I had not been saved. Instead of falling out of the frying pan and into the fire, I had risen out of the icebox and into a place called "Absolute Zero."

My life had come to a complete halt. Except for my daily visits to physical therapy, I barely moved from that hospital bed. In my state of depression, I had little interest in anything, especially food. Were it not for Rachel's insistence that I "at least eat something," I might have disappeared completely. One might describe it as kind of an unplanned "fast" that lasted for months.

Despite the lack of food (or because of it), my body ran a very high fever. I would wake up in the middle of the night soaking in sweat and shivering from the cold.

My doctor said it was probably due to the nerve damage I had suffered from being frozen or possibly a side effect of all the medications I was on. But I knew the real reason. How could I not know? It was that dream (or nightmare). It had by that point taken over my reality. It had become my entire existence.

While my outward motion had come to a complete halt, it seemed that my inward journey was just beginning. I'm sure Hazelwood would have described it as a transfer of "kinetic" (or moving) energy to "potential" (or non-moving) energy since, according to Newton's Law of Energy Conservation, energy itself can never be lost – it simply goes someplace else. I had always found this kind of "hidden energy" to be a rather odd concept. I wondered where energy went when it was hiding. Now I was about to find out.

It began as a kind of reoccurring nightmare. In my sleep, I kept reliving the ordeal of my fall into the crevasse. Every time, I would feel a horrible sinking feeling as the snow gave way beneath my feet. Then there was a feeling of helplessness as I fell. This was always followed by the hard landing. Next was the awful feeling of the bitter numbing cold as it completely sucked the heat out of my body. I would wake up shivering and in a complete state of panic. This went on for several nights.

Finally, there came a night when I simply gave up. I was completely exhausted. Instead of panic, I simply let go, and resigned myself to my fate.

Suddenly, there was a break through as a new phase of the dream began to unfold ... After my body had become completely frozen, I fell through a hole in the hole! Again, I was falling, but it was a different kind of falling. It was like I was falling and rising at the same time.

As I fell, I could hear Hazelwood's voice. He was talking about Absolute Zero – a place where distance doesn't exist and time becomes infinite.

Next, I would see the Native American girl standing next to a pool of water saying, "Remember the Spring of Life, the beginning of all change, the meaning of your name."

Then, as I continued to fall (or rise) I would see Old Lou laughing at the flatlanders and dancing in the dark with ghosts that glowed and shimmered like giant Snow Birds. The light from the ghosts became as bright as a hot sun in the middle of the desert. Then all motion completely stopped.

I looked around and found that I was laying in a dead treeless wasteland. I felt like I had traveled back through a hole in both space and time. For some reason, I knew exactly where I was. I was in England, in a large, deserted field just outside a town called Chesterfield. I had come here (or been brought here) to look for Chris. I felt like she was in grave danger and somehow I had to find a way to save her.

I walked in to the large, crowded, noisy city; but I couldn't find her anywhere. The town was filled with people who just stared blankly into space, like they had lost their direction and sense of purpose. I spent what seemed like days there, but no one would talk to me. They were either too busy or simply didn't see me. There were large factories everywhere. I got the sense that everyone was urgently preparing for some kind of war. Inside the factories, people ran machines, but it was really the other way around; it was the machines that ran the workers.

I looked up and saw a wave of small planes flying overhead. Soon, bombs started falling and buildings exploded around me. There were people running and screaming in all directions. In desperation, I ran back to the large deserted field. It was a mistake. The planes followed me as they continued to drop their bombs. There was no place to hide. I tried to find a hole, a crevasse, to fall in to; but the ground was too hard. I tried to cry, but couldn't. Bombs landed in the field all around me. The earth itself was shaking.

I tried to scream, but I had no voice. I couldn't even breath. I was completely panic-stricken, shaking violently ... when I was awoken by Rachel.

She said I was just having a nightmare and that everything was okay now. It was morning and time for breakfast. Outside I could hear the calming sound of the cold rain falling on the streets of Seattle. I was exhausted and covered with sweat.

I tried hard that day to avoid going back to sleep. I was afraid the terrible dream might repeat itself. I listened to the radio, read a book and watched T.V. But the day sped by and soon it was night again. I stayed up until midnight watching T.V., but despite my efforts, I eventually fell asleep – and immediately fell back down into the crevasse of time and space. Only this time I fell much further. I was simply too exhausted to resist the falling motion.

I fell past the point of Absolute Zero, past Lou dancing with Ghosts and past the Spring of Life. Time and space ended as I rose through the hole of bright light. Again, I found myself laying in that clearing near Chesterfield. I knew or felt that I had gone still further back in time. The field was now smaller and was bordered by patches of trees in which I could hear small birds quietly singing. Somehow I knew I was in Victorian England and that there was a mystery, a Sherlock Holmes mystery I had to solve in order to save Chris. But how could I solve a riddle if I didn't even know what it was? And how could I save Chris if I couldn't even find her?

Again I walked to town which now was much smaller than before. The streets were basically dirt and mud. I realized that to solve the riddle I would need some clues. In order to get those clues, I would have to get to know every person in the whole town. This took all night. In fact, it took several days and nights.

I was past the point of exhaustion. It was during this time that my dreams became my reality and the waking world became the illusion. Every night I would live years. The days in between were but brief interruptions. Every day, time would accelerate as my temperature rose and I sweated like a hot, humid rain. Every night, time would stop as my soul fell into the deep cold of Absolute Zero.

Finally, I figured out the riddle. It wasn't so much the people that were important, or even the town. I realized that every person there and every event were just symbols. They were all symbols of a much deeper mystery. To solve this deeper mystery, to save Chris, I would have to go still further back in time.

So the next night, I closed my eyes and deliberately allowed myself to fall still further down the crevasse of Absolute Zero. The further back I went, the more time in the dream world seemed to slow down (or alternately, it may have been time in the real world that sped up). In this way, I would live an entire lifetime in a single dream. Soon I was living several lifetimes in one night. It was like I was learning or perhaps unlearning the lessons, values and beliefs of our entire culture.

At the end of every lifetime, I had solved another part of the riddle, but the goal of finding Chris still eluded me. As soon as I had learned or unlearned a lesson, the next (or rather previous) lifetime would begin. Each lifetime was connected to, but separate from the life before. Each lifetime had a lesson that was connected to but separate from the lessons that had come before.

For example, there was the lifetime that I met the baker and the beggar. It was during the time when the field I woke up in was completely surrounded by a small forest. That is, it was before the time when the field had completely disappeared. The town of Chesterfield had by now shrunk to the size of a small rural farming village. Its chief asset was groves of large chestnut trees. The village itself was on a flat plain just above the river and surrounded by fields of wheat and oats.

I walked in to this village and recognized many of the people living there. I knew them in a way, but it was not in the normal way of knowing. Perhaps it was that I had met their descendants on a previous trip and I knew them as one knows a seed from having seen the tree that grew out of it.

The villagers welcomed me as if I were a traveler from a distant place. One of them allowed me to stay with him, living in his small barn. It was really only a storage shed but at least it kept me somewhat dry and warm. He even offered me a job.

His name was Will and he was what we might call a baker. But he was really much more than that. He was the village's model citizen. He worked all day long. Some days, he would go out and gather wheat. Other days he would thrash the wheat and collect the grain. Then there was the grinding to turn the wheat into flour, and finally the baking to turn the flour into bread. The bread was delicious. His secret was adding large quantities of crushed chestnuts to the flour mixture.

During that lifetime, I became kind of his apprentice. He had plenty enough work to keep both of us busy from sunrise to sunset.

It seemed to me that the entire village had been built around this baker. There wasn't much of what we would call money, so virtually everything was obtained by trading. Some people would trade him bags of chestnuts or bags of grain for his bread. Others would trade chicken eggs. Another would trade goats milk and blankets woven from goats hair. Still another traded pots, chairs, tables – kind of a moving general store. The trader received a large number of loaves for these rare items, more than he himself could possibly eat. I was told that he traveled about over a wide area, getting the pots from a mountainous region many miles away and using Will's bread not only as food but also as a universal kind of money, trading the bread in other places for whatever he thought the baker might want to buy from him.

The trader gave the bread the name by which everyone in the country eventually called it. He sold the bread as "Chestnut and Field" bread. I realized that some day this would be shortened to Chest and Field bread from which eventually would come the name of the town that grew up on this spot – Chesterfield.

The baker, through this traveling trader, had accumulated a lot of stuff. He had a wife, who herself was a hard worker, and two children. But for some reason, the baker's life seemed to me to be a difficult one. Maybe this was because, as his apprentice, I worked almost as hard as he did. I wasn't used to the long hours. What was particularly tiring was the constant grinding of the wheat into flour. It was very monotonous. Not even the baker could handle this job very long. So, while the baker baked bread, I often got stuck with the wheat grinding job. There was no end to it, seeing as how there was always more wheat that needed grinding, while flour was always in short supply. I felt like my very soul was being ground away.

But the baker's real difficulty was the constant feuding that went on around him. To begin with, he didn't get along with his wife. They seemed to disagree on just about every issue. The two children were somewhat lazy and completely unruly. The baker blamed his wife for this problem and she in turn blamed the baker. There were also disputes with his customers over how much bread a particular blanket was worth. While the baker was looked up to and even envied by those around him, he wasn't necessarily liked. He was, it seemed to me, a rather unhappy man despite his comparative wealth.

Then there was "the beggar." At least that is what he was called by the baker. Most of the villagers called him the Story Teller. I eventually learned his real name was Wynd. He was about as different from the baker as anyone could be. He was a vagabond who traveled from village to village telling stories to children and giving Sunday sermons to the adults. He was teacher, preacher, actor, poet and bum all rolled in to one.

Time took on a different meaning in this village. They didn't have weeks and months as such, only seasons. The year was divided into the planting season, the growing season, the harvest season and the rest season. Since they didn't have weeks, they obviously didn't have days of the week. Sunday then was whatever day Wynd happened to be in town.

This event happened about once every seven days and so I came to associate Wynd's arrival with Sunday. But curiously the townsfolk referred to this day as Wynd's day.

Wynd would show up completely unannounced carrying only a small bundle wrapped around his waist. He owned next to nothing. He was obviously older than the baker, but his smile gave him the appearance of being much younger. In fact, at times in a certain light such as near dawn or dusk, he looked almost like a child. Upon his arrival, just about everyone in town dropped whatever they were doing in order to listen to his stories. Even the baker was forced to take this day off – as a kind of concession to his wife and kids. The beggar had nothing to trade, but he was so well liked that the villagers gave him more food than he could possible eat.

The baker's wife brought enough bread to feed not only Wynd, but everyone else who showed up for these meetings. This was one of the many disputes the baker had with her; and was perhaps responsible for the baker's obvious dislike of the traveler he insisted upon calling the beggar.

Wynd would begin his meetings by telling particular villagers about their relatives in other nearby hamlets. This was little more than a summary of who had given birth, was ill, was injured or had recently died. He seemed to know every person in the region on a first name basis. (I forgot to mention that Wynd was also the village reporter).

Wynd would then move almost seamlessly into telling about the happenings in villages much farther away, in a place that was "on the other side of the mountains." At first, I thought this was an actual place. The villagers certainly listened and talked about the place as if it was real. But I eventually decided it couldn't be a real place. I reasoned that Wynd couldn't possibly travel such a long distance in only six or seven days.

The other thing that made me suspicious were the stories themselves about the events that occurred on the other side of the mountain. They were fantastic tales – about knights dueling with wizards and dragons and the like. Wynd had a way of describing these things as if they were real. Every week he would add more details on to this mythical story. Had I not known the whole thing to be impossible, I might have believed him myself. As it was, I was just glad to get the day off.

Wynd's symbolic stories about knights and wizards almost always illustrated an important lesson of life. Some would stress the importance of honesty (a knight would tell a lie and all kinds of trouble would follow). Others were more complicated (the king would be betrayed by one of his knights and discover that a wizard who was suppose to be his enemy was actually his best friend). I came to think of Wynd's stories as simple sermons or parables. They were fairly primitive and filled with contradictions, but they had a liveliness, a vitality about them that was more sophisticated than any modern movie. This is why I thought of Wynd as a kind of teacher or minister. It was because his stories had a spiritual, even mystical nature.

One of his main characters was a young knight named Percival. Percival had originally started out as a small farm boy; but by the time I met Wynd, Percival was doing battle with some dangerous dragons whom Wynd called the Terrible Twins.

Supposedly, the kingdom on the other side of the mountains was ruled by a great and wise king called Arthur. But the Terrible Twins threatened to destroy the whole kingdom and King Arthur was powerless to stop them.

Wynd described the Twins as four dragons, two small ones and two large ones. The small dragons were called Fear and Ignorance. The large ones were known as Anger and Greed. The dragons were impossible to kill because they were immortal. Many knights had sacrificed their lives trying to stab them to death, but the dragons would simply come right back to life. The situation seemed hopeless.

But Percival finally solved the riddle (with the advice and help of an old wizard named Merlin). Rather than trying to kill the dragons, Percival became their friend. He would offer them water to drink (for as Wynd explained with a broad smile, fire breathing dragons are always thirsty). Eventually Percival tricked the dragons. He got them to drink from a large golden cup Merlin had given him. The cup was called the Holy Grail. According to Wynd, this cup would magically transform anything that drinks from it. After drinking from this cup, the dragon of Ignorance turned into Wisdom, the dragon of Fear turned into Courage, and the dragons of Anger and Greed were turned into Forgiveness and Compassion. Evidently what was in the cup was a special potion Merlin had made. Merlin called his potion "the magic of love."

This was only one of several stories Wynd told the villagers during the time I spent there.

After many years, the baker's wife died quite suddenly. Soon after her death, the children, who were by now teenagers, both ran off. They told me to tell their father they were going to see "the other side of the mountains". The baker was grief stricken over the loss of his wife and children. Evidently, despite appearances to the contrary, he had really loved them. He told me that everything he had ever done had been for them. I believed him. I could see the sorrow in his old and worn out face. He himself died later that same year, although there seemed to be no apparent reason for his death.

The baker left his business enterprise to me, but I didn't want it. There were two other apprentices and I told them they could have it. But before I had even left the village, they were already starting to fight over it.

On my way back to the clearing in the forest, I ran into the story teller. I asked how long it took him to reach that place "on the other side of the mountains."

He replied it wasn't far at all – he went there every night in his dreams.

As I woke up the next morning in my hospital bed, I felt like I had been gone an entire lifetime. The symbolic meaning behind this experience, like that of all the other dreams was obvious ... It was simply another version of that ancient advice, "man does not live by bread alone." While we think our happiness comes from gathering possessions and listening to the Will of our mind, the true meaning of life is in learning to listen to the Wynd of our soul.

Night after night, I had dreams like that as I fell further down the tunnel of Absolute Zero. There were lifetimes when I felt hopelessly lost. I would drink from the creek of confusion rather than the well of wisdom. I spent entire nights trapped in a maze of contradictions and dead-ends; filled with feelings and events that defied even description much less explanation.

There was only one common thread which held the fabric of my existence together ... it was my searching for Chris. She was the bright but elusive soul who was always one step ahead of me in our cosmic race across the depths of time and space.

I realize all of this may sound like I had some kind of psychotic obsession with finding Chris. But it was really much different than that. It was more like a realization that I was only half a person without her ... and she was only half a person without me. I felt like we were both birds with only one wing. In order to fly, each of us needed the other half in a mysterious way that neither of us understood. Without Chris, I couldn't solve this riddle. But without solving the riddle, how could I ever find Chris?

There were other lifetimes that would blaze before my eyes with a brief but beautiful clarity of purpose. It was during one of those moments of clarity that I realized there was an additional meaning to the term "Absolute Zero."

Hidden in its name was another symbol ... "from A to Z." It was alpha and omega, beginning and end. It was the symbol for everything that ever existed. It was the tree of life. It was the web of time. It was a name for that which has no name. It was the light that shines in the darkness.

In this way, I began to perceive the true nature of my dreams ... that there were symbols within symbols and meanings within meanings, just as there were dreams within dreams and lifetimes within lifetimes.

As I fell further back into time, the clearing I kept waking up in got smaller and smaller and the trees grew bigger and bigger. Eventually, I was waking up in a forest. The village meanwhile became as small as the clearing had been. Then it disappeared. There was nothing left of it at all. I was now surrounded by an Old Growth Forest. The air was filled with birds – thousands of them. The river where the village used to be was filled with fish.

It was near the river that I met one of the "wooden people." He was a old man and lived, exactly as the Dreamer Indians had once described, inside of a very large tree! It was like he had dug out a hollow area in the base of the tree.

Either that or the tree had simply grown up with this hollow area from the beginning. The old man, who looked vaguely like Lou, had a strange, almost timeless appearance about him.

He acted as if he were expecting me. Without moving his lips, he looked in my eyes and said (or appeared to say), "It is about time you have come".

He looked at me intently, then added, "So, this is the child of White Bird's prophesy. The Spring of Life."

At first, I had trouble understanding the old man. I thought maybe he just had a strange accent. Then I realized he wasn't talking, at least not in the normal sense of the word. While I heard what he said, what I heard was not with my ears. Rather, it was like I had to listen to him with my heart. His thoughts came to me in a way that was more powerful than mere words. His way of communicating ideas was beyond description.

The old man smiled, "Such a powerful name for such a small child. Still you have done well to make it this far. At least you are persistent. Time is a friend of those who keep trying."

Then he congratulated me for solving the symbolic nature of the riddle of Absolute Zero, adding "God gave you all the brains you'll ever need. But like this tree, what is hidden is more important than what is seen. As the tree of life grows from the seed of love, so does your own soul grow from the seed of your own compassion."

I asked if he knew where Chris was. He said she was in a cave in the middle of the forest. He explained that the cave was guarded by four "druids" (or perhaps it was four "droids"). He could put them to sleep, but they would not dream for very long.

Then he added that I could not save her – or anything else – until I learned to save myself. "You cannot see her if you have no eyes. Nor can you hear her if you have no ears."

Wisdom," he said without speaking, "comes only from learning the Sacred Way."

I asked the old man what he meant by the "Sacred Way."

He replied, "Every problem has three solutions. The first is to run away, but that will only work for those who are afraid. The second is to stay, but that will only work for those who are not afraid. The third way will work for all but is seen by none. That is the path of wisdom. That is the Sacred Way."

I asked him how I could find the cave and he shrugged his tired old shoulders, "That is the easiest part; all you have to do is go back the way you came. But you are not ready for the hard part".

"Ready or not I have to at least try to find her".

He shook his head and said "Patience... That is always the hardest part".

But I barely heard his words. I was already on my way to Chris. I did not understand much about the rest of what he said, but I knew instantly what he meant by "go back the way you came." I practically ran back to the place where the field had once been.

I had come so far through time and space. I had to at least try to save Chris. Whether I could save her or not, it was worth risking my life just to get the chance to see her again.

I approached the cave and found the four guards were sound asleep just as the old man had said.

The guards looked like cave people, two of whom were small children and two who were formidable-looking older men. I quietly slipped past them.

Slowly entering the dark, cold cave, I walked along a narrow ledge that led first down and then up to a high flat area. The cavern was covered with moss. The ceiling of the cavern had a small opening through which came a single shaft of light. In the floor of the cavern was a small pool of water that reflected the beam of light onto the moss. Next to the pool on a flat rock was a large block of clear ice ... and inside of the block of ice was Chris! The ice was lit up by a glowing which appeared to be coming from Chris's heart.

I tried to chip away at the ice with a rock but the ice was too hard and my rock was too dull. After over an hour of trying to chip away the ice, I realized I could not save Chris. It would have taken me forever to chip away that block of ice.

I had come so far and tried so hard that, to get this close and then to fail at the end, was more than I could take. I sat down next to the block of ice and cried. I cried harder than I had ever cried before. I had finally given up. The tears ran off of my face and rolled like drops of mercury across the floor in to the small pool.

As the ripples from the small drops cleared, I looked at the pool and noticed it had turned into a kind of transparent mirror. Out of this mirror came three magic kitties. One kitty was mostly white with some black splotches. The second was mostly black with white splotches. For some reason, I remember it had white feet. The third kitty was a small grey cat.

The kitties (without talking) said, "We know how to save her. It's easy!"

As I looked on in amazement, the kitties surrounded the block of ice and rubbed against it, the way cats will do to indicate they love you. Within moments, the block had melted, the water ran into the pool and Chris stood there smiling.

I hugged her for the longest time. I told her that I loved her and that I had been searching for her for many, many lifetimes. I tried to explain what I had gone through to find her, but it was impossible. Finally, fearing that the Droids (or whatever they were) would eventually wake up. I told Chris we should leave the cave immediately.

Chris however protested that she couldn't leave the cave; if she did so she would disappear. Chris was afraid, but I insisted – we must leave and get away. I told her to trust me and everything would be okay. Chris eventually yielded and, together with the magic kitties, she followed me out of the cave. We made our way quietly past the four sleeping guards and out in to the forest.

Finally, when we were far from the cave, I stopped and gave Chris a hug. As she hugged me back, I closed my eyes. But when I opened them again, Chris and the magic kitties had disappeared.

A voice came from somewhere in the forest and, without talking said, "You cannot save anyone until you learn the Sacred Way."

Sad and exhausted, I woke up. I knew that my month long dream had finally ended. I also knew who the four guards at the cave had been. They were Ignorance, Fear, Anger and Greed. They had wakened from their dream and returned Chris to the Cave of Darkness.

The situation was hopeless. Unlike Percival, I had no magic cup, nor did I know any magic wizards. All I really knew was the cold numbing pain of a place called Absolute Zero.

At least there would be no more dreams or nightmares. I slept for several days; but my depression would not go away. It was like a crevasse. Easy to fall into, but impossible to climb back out.

SNOW BIRDS

PART FOUR

SPRING



*The feathers of hope
Are the flowers of Spring
It's the sun in the morning
When birds start to sing*

*They sing the song of the mountains
And the joy in their wings
Lifts the sun ever higher
To grow the flowers of Spring*

Chapter Thirteen ... The Hummingbird Lesson

*Climb the mountains and get their good tidings.
Nature's peace will flow into you as sunshine flows into trees.
The winds will blow their own freshness into you,
And the storms their energy,
While cares will drop off like autumn leaves.*

John Muir

The short cold days of winter gradually gave way to longer and warmer days. I continued with the rehabilitation of my once frozen leg. This consisted of periodic muscle exercises alternating with ultrasound and hot soaking treatments. Slowly, I graduated from the wheelchair and isometric exercises to long crutches and short walks. The blood thinning treatments had finally stopped. I knew the time was growing near. Soon I would be leaving the hospital.

There had been no word from Chris. No phone calls and no letters. I had written her many letters, but I never mailed them; partly because I didn't want to bother her ... and partly because inside I was still hurting. No matter how hard I tried, I just couldn't understand what had happened between us ... or why.

There had also been no word from Thomas. Rachel said it wasn't unusual for kids to suddenly leave the safety of the shelter. She still hoped he would return some day, but "when" she did not know. "It's such a harsh world out there," she explained. "It's going to be difficult for him to find something to believe in. I know all he really needs is hope."

Then, on a rainy evening, Rachel came to tell me the good news. The doctors had decided my leg was now well enough to heal on its own. In less than a week, I would be allowed to leave. But the news didn't cheer me up. I had lost my best friend. Chris was still my whole reason for living. I couldn't even conceive of life without her. Where would I go? What would I do? Rachel could tell I was sad and discouraged. In the previous months, her words of support had been limited to helping me heal my leg. But she decided the time had come to address the real issue of my rehabilitation. She sighed and then said, "Dave, it's your friend, Chris, isn't it?"

I nodded my head as I sat there looking out the window. Then she continued, "I just want to know one thing ... how much longer do you plan on feeling sorry for yourself?"

"It isn't that," I protested.

"Well, if it isn't that, then what is it?" she smiled.

I paused for a moment and then said, "You just don't understand."

"Don't I?" she replied with confidence, "You had a few problems and your girl left you, so now you're just going to give up."

"What else can I do?" I asked meekly.

Shaking her head, Rachel said with a note of frustration, "You just don't get it, do you? You haven't learned a single thing since you got here."

"What do you mean?" I asked.

"Can't you see?" she said, now more out of exasperation, "The homeless kids, the dying salmon, the Snow Birds – even your problems with your friend Chris – they're all caused by the same thing."

"I don't understand," I said blankly.

Rachel took a deep breath and then continued, "That's the problem. You don't understand. You're so locked up in your own little world you can't see the big picture.

You can't see the forest from the trees. There is a whole world out there that needs your help, but all you can think about is ..."

As she kept talking, I recalled my first sunrise in Old Growth. I thought, "There was a time when I saw the forest – it all seems so long ago now. Had I forgot that lesson already?"

Rachel continued, "Don't you see. This isn't about saving a few trees or a few fish. It's about caring. Caring about somebody and something besides yourself. That's what's missing in our world right now. That's why kids like Thomas are losing hope. It's because we get so wrapped up in our own personal problems, we forget about the most important thing of all. Why, just look at what our own government is doing – taking money away from children's programs and protecting the environment, all so they can build more bombs – and people are doing nothing to stop them. It's like they just don't care."

"But I care," I protested.

"Do you?" she asked.

"Look," I tried to explain, "if I didn't care about Chris, I wouldn't be so sad right now."

"That's just what I mean," Rachel smiled. "Tell me, how is your being sad going to help Chris out? How's it going to help homeless kids or homeless birds ... or make a single thing better in this world?"

"You just don't understand," I looked away as I tried to hold back my tears. "Chris was my entire world. Now that she's gone, all I have left is a broken heart ... and I just don't know how to fix it."

Rachel's voice changed to a softer tone as she said, "Dave, I know how you can heal your heart. It's the same way you healed your leg." She paused for a moment and then continued, "Look, do you think your leg would have healed if you just stayed in bed and sulked about it?"

I shook my head and she went on, "Well, it's no different with your heart. It will never heal if you just give up. No matter how painful it is at first, you can't be afraid to use it; and the more you care, the stronger your heart will get."

Somehow it didn't seem fair. I appreciated Rachel's concern, but inside I was still angry. "Why?" I asked bitterly, "You say I shouldn't run away ... but what about Chris. She ran away ... and I don't even know why ... why did she leave?"

There was a long pause. My question had been addressed more to God than to Rachel. I wasn't really expecting an answer. It was a question I had asked God many times this past winter. I had come to believe there was no answer.

Thankfully, Rachel was wiser than me. She joined me at the window, and as we both looked outside, she gently said "Dave, there's a lot of reasons why someone might run away. Sometimes, people run away because they're angry about the past or afraid of the future. Maybe it was the problem solving strategy they learned as a child. Its like a bad habit they don't even know they have. Psychologists call it "avoidance and denial." Maybe she ran away because she was confused and she didn't know what else she could do."

Rachel paused, took a deep breath, and then continued, "Dave, I don't know Chris. I don't know why she ran away. The truth is it doesn't really matter. One of the hardest lessons in life is that we have very little control over what other people choose to think or do. All we can do is live our own lives the best way we know how."

Again Rachel paused and then added, "There is a whole world out there that desperately needs our help. It's going to take a lot of caring if we're going to make things better."

Rachel put her hand on my shoulder and said with a smile of encouragement, "You know, whenever I'm feeling down and discouraged, I think about hummingbirds."

They're such small creatures, but they have such big hearts ... and such noble spirits. Have you ever watched a hummingbird?"

"Not really," I said still rather dejected.

"Well you should sometime. They're quite comical. Those things can fly backward, forward, up, down, on their side – even upside down! There's another thing about those little birds. They never give up. You know, hummingbirds have to fly over a thousand miles each year. You don't see them complaining or feeling sorry for themselves. No sir. They keep right on flying ... and right on trying."

"So I tell myself ... if those little birds can fly a thousand miles, then maybe I should keep trying too." Rachel looked at me, smiled, and added, "And so should you!"

* * *

The next day, Rachel came to my room and said "Dave, we're having a special event for the Salmon Savers this week-end. I was hoping you might help us out."

I still wasn't feeling very energetic, but I really admired the Salmon Savers; so I replied, "What would you like me to do?"

Rachel smiled and explained "Well, we managed to get a bus and, if the forecast for clear weather holds, we'd like to take the kids out to the mountains for the day. I know this place where we could do a day hike and build a campfire for a sing along. It should be loads of fun, but we could really use some more adults to help keep track of the kids during our hike. It's just a short walk along a river to a waterfall – and the exercise would do you some good. So what do you say? Will you help us?"

I didn't even need to think about it. The chance to see the mountains again was something I really needed. I replied "Sure...I'd love to come."

On a bright sunny Saturday morning, I joined the Salmon Savers as Rachel drove an old, run-down school bus out to the Cascade mountains East of Seattle. Thankfully, the drive didn't take long – because neither the children nor the bus looked like they could have handled much more.

Rachel led the hike up a well-defined path along a large mountain river. We were a big group. There were over two dozen kids and two other nurses from the hospital. The older kids walked up with Rachel. Since I was still moving kind of slow, I brought up the back of the group with the youngest ones. A short distance up the trail, we came across the largest tree I have ever seen. It was a cedar tree. Rachel said it was over a thousand years old. She had the children hold hands and form a circle around the giant tree. It was so huge, the children couldn't quite complete their circle. Rachel suggested I join the kids in order to close the circle. The tree seemed to get even bigger the nearer I got to it.

As I joined hands with the kids, one of them said we should all look up. I looked up, but I could not see the top of this huge tree. It seemed to be rising straight up to heaven. Rachel had told the kids that Native Americans believed these ancient trees were wise and sacred spirits. Standing there, so close to that tree, I could clearly feel the specialness of that place.

The kids didn't want to leave the big tree, but Rachel said there were more trees up ahead and we should keep walking. After a while we reached a small but very beautiful waterfall. We stopped here in a sunny spot and had lunch.

Then one of the children came running up to the group and said there was a seal swimming in the river. All the kids wanted to run over and see it; but Rachel corralled them cautioned them to approach it very slowly and quietly or they might scare it away. She showed the kids how to walk in slow motion and how to set their feet down carefully like an Indian. She advised them not to say a word.

She then slowly led the group to the river bank. As it turned out, it was not a seal. Instead, swimming and playing in a deep pool was an entire family of river otters. For the next hour, the children quietly watched the otters play in the river below us. Lunch was all but forgotten.

Eventually, Rachel led us back to the school bus that was parked at a small and nearly deserted campground near the river. While we were trying to get a fire started for the sing along, one of the children, in an obvious state of distress, ran up to Rachel and cried out "***There's a hummingbird stuck in the bus!***"

Rachel tried to reassure the child that everything would be okay and then led us back to the bus to investigate. By now, all the children had gathered around the bus. Evidently, the small bird had entered through the door or a window at the front of the bus and had gotten confused. It was now trying to get out through the window at the very back of the bus. Unfortunately, all the windows were closed and, due to the age of the bus, could not be opened. The hummingbird kept pecking its small pointed beak against the large back window but to no avail. It was hard to tell who was in a worse state of panic – the little bird inside the bus or the little children outside watching.

Rachel tried to take charge of the situation and reassure the children, "All right everyone...calm down now. Everything is going to be okay."

She then looked over at me and said, in a lower tone of voice, "Those hummingbirds are as fast as bullets...I don't know how we're ever gonna get it out of that bus. Have you got any ideas?"

Being fairly ignorant of the speed and maneuverability of hummingbirds, I offered to try to catch it.

With the children and Rachel outside watching, I went inside the empty school bus and slowly made my way to the back. The small green hummingbird was so focused on pecking away at the back window that it failed to notice me sneaking up behind it.

I knew I would only have one chance at it, so I prayed "God help me." My hands came together and gently cupped around the little bird – while it was still in mid-air!

The hummingbird was so small that it fit easily in the space between my cupped hands. It seemed to weigh almost nothing. The only thing I could feel was the nervous shaking of its body and the rapid beating of its heart.

I carefully made my way to the front of the bus with the little bird between by palms. All of the children followed me as I walked toward a clearing near the river. When I got there, I took a deep breath and then opened my hands.

The precious bird leaped out of my palms and flew past the clearing, quickly disappearing into the trees on the far side of the river. As I watched the little bird fly away, the children all cheered and Rachel came over and gave me a hug.

It was a magical moment. But for reasons I did not then understand, I couldn't share in their celebration. Instead, I just stood there with a tear in my eye and stared at the spot where the hummingbird had flown away. Though it was still warm out, I felt frozen and cold....like my whole body was made of ice.

As the large yellow sun began to dip down and touch the western horizon, the children all migrated to the campfire and began roasting marshmallows on wooden sticks. Yet for over an hour, I remained seated alone in that clearing by the river.

I could hear the children laughing in the distance, but my body seemed frozen in that spot. I could see the purple reflection of the setting sun floating on the slowly moving water in the river below me. I could feel a gentle breeze against my face and I could hear frogs quietly chirping in a meadow nearby. But my mind was someplace else.

Slowly, it became clear to me why I hadn't celebrated the hummingbird's successful escape. It was because of Chris. Once I had held her in the palm of my hands. Like the hummingbird, she was so bright and beautiful...and so confused and scared. I loved her so much. How could I let her go?

That is why I didn't want to let the little bird go. But like with Chris, I had no other choice. The frightened bird was shaking in my hands. It wanted to be free. I had to let it go.

Tears came to my eyes as, in my mind, I again opened my hands and watched the little bird fly away. Only this time, it was Chris I was letting go and Chris that flew away. Time and again, I watched the little bird fly away . . . carrying away my hopes and dreams on its little wings.

She was my best friend. God only knows how much I missed her. I realized then that the hardest part of loving someone was the time to let them go.

So much had happened this past year . . . the summer job, the miner, the crevasse. It had all come down to this - me sitting in this field by a river and crying. I realized that I was afraid. I was afraid to face the future without her. I was afraid that the sun was setting on everything that was important to me.

I saw that I too was like the hummingbird. I was trapped in the back of the bus and I didn't know how to get out. Surely there had to be an open window somewhere.

Just then, Bobbie, who was one of the younger Salmon Savers, came up to me. As he held up a small crooked stick that had a burnt black blob on the end of it, he asked, "Would you like a marshmallow?"

I smiled and said, "Maybe a little later." I didn't want to hurt his feelings so I quickly added, "But I would like a hug."

Bobbie gave me a big hug and said, "I love you Mr. Iceman."

It was like someone had waved a magic wand over me.

The window on the bus came open. Suddenly I wasn't frozen anymore.

I rubbed Bobbie's head and said, "Why don't you call me David . . . I'm not the Iceman anymore."

"Then he asked, "Are you okay?"

I paused for a moment as in my mind I watched the hummingbird fly away for one last time. I turned to Bobbie and said, "Yeah, I am now."

We both smiled and then he ran back to the rest of the group.

As darkness approached, I walked back toward the campfire. The children had all gathered around Rachel and she had been singing them songs. When she saw I had finally joined the group, she smiled and told them, "This song is for Mr. Spring." Then she sang the children a song. It was a song about hummingbirds.

The following week, on my last day in the hospital, Rachel gave me a book. She said, "It's for helping out this past weekend." She added, "It's about those hummingbirds. I had an extra copy ... and I thought you might like it."

All I could say was, "Thank you, Ms. Carson."

She replied, "You're welcome, Mr. Spring."

* * *

As Spring came to Seattle, I took walks in the local parks, trying to get the strength back in my leg. On one particularly sunny day, I decided to take a look at the hummingbird book Rachel had given me. I sat in the park and began to read.

The book explained that hummingbirds are one of the most unique miracles of nature. They are the smallest warm-blooded animals on Earth. Some of them migrate as much as 3,000 miles in a single month. Since we are about 100 times bigger than a hummingbird, it would be like a person traveling 300,000 miles in a month – 10,000 miles a day for 30 days – traveling completely around the world in 3 days. No matter how I tried to think of it, their achievement was beyond my imagination. They were indeed a “miracle” of nature.

The book then explained how hummingbirds were able to accomplish such great things. “The secret,” the book said, “was in their hearts.” It seems that hummingbirds had bigger hearts, for their size, than any other animal on Earth. They were not just symbolically but also truthfully “all heart.”

Sadly the end of the book went on to describe how hummingbirds are losing their homes, as forests both here in America (where they spend their summers) and in the tropics (where they spend their winters) are being destroyed. The book said that twenty-nine species of hummingbirds were listed in 1988 by the International Council for Bird Preservation as being threatened with extinction due to loss of habitat.

Their homes were being destroyed by clear-cutting and other forms of human “progress”. The threatened species included the “bee” hummingbird – the world’s smallest bird – and the “marvelous” hummingbird – widely regarded to be the most beautiful animal in the world.

The book explained that hummingbirds, like other birds, were important not only because they helped to pollinate plants but also because they ate lots of bugs, and therefore helped to prevent bug infestation and protect human crops. The book concluded that we should try to protect hummingbirds, not only for their sake, but also for our own.

I put down the book and thought about Lou’s warning at the end of his letter.

As I looked up, I was surprised to see a little green hummingbird hovering nearby. It was looking for nectar in the small white flowers of an azalea bush that had just come in to bloom.

The brave little bird reminded me of Chris. While I was watching that hummingbird, I began to understand that I could still love something even though I could not hold it.

I had finally learned the hummingbird’s lesson...that love was not something that could be held in our hands. For it to live at all, love has to be set free.

I decided to stop feeling sorry for myself...and to start trying again. How silly I had been to think I had saved that little bird by the river. It was clear to me now it was the little hummingbird who had saved me.

Chapter Fourteen ... Climbing Mountains

*Whatever you can do or dream you can, begin it.
Boldness has genius, power and magic in it.*

Goethe

No matter what Chris said, I knew the Snow Birds were real ... and I had to do something to save them. I thought, "Maybe if other people knew about them ... maybe someone else could help me."

I decided to see that reporter who had visited me in the hospital, Donnie Walker. I went into the Seattle Times Building and asked to speak with him.

The receptionist said, "Mr. Walker? He's in the News Room, ... Can I tell him who's calling?"

I gave her my name. After she made a brief phone call, she said, "Okay, Mr. Spring, go up that elevator to your right. He'll meet you at the fourth floor."

The elevator slowly rose to the fourth floor. As the door opened, Mr. Walker smiled warmly and held out his hand, "Well, if it isn't the Iceman. It's good to see you. So you're up and around. That's great! Say, Dave, what brings you here?"

"Mr. Walker, I was hoping I could meet with you for a couple of minutes."

"Sure, Dave ... come over to my desk. But, listen, none of that Mr. Walker stuff," he laughed. "The name's Donnie."

We walked through an extremely large and busy room. There were perhaps a hundred reporters there, working at a hundred desks. At every desk, there was a phone and a computer ... and a reporter who was using both at the same time! As we worked our way across the room, no one looked up or gave us the slightest notice. We could have been invisible.

Mr. Walker's desk was on the far side of the newsroom near a window, but it looked just like all the other desks. There were stacks of papers and manila folders everywhere.

"Pull up a chair." he offered, as he moved some files off of a chair to make room for me.

I sat down ... and looked out the window. Then I looked back at Donnie and said rather nervously, "I don't know where to begin."

Donnie smiled and said, "We got time. Why don't you start at the beginning. That's always a good place. "

As Donnie took notes, I told him my story, at least as much of it as I could remember. I told him about the Starfish and the Gypsy Moths ... about the Dreamers and the sunrise in Old Growth. Then I explained about the hermit dancing with ghosts in the moonlight and about the letter and the dinosaurs and passenger pigeons. I told him all about Chris and the Snow Birds and falling in the crevasse. I explained who the Salmon Savers were and how a hummingbird got trapped in the back of the school bus. I ended by pulling the feather out of an envelope I had in my pocket.

I handed the feather to Donnie ... and he held it up in the light.

"It doesn't glow anymore," I said rather meekly, "but it used to."

After I finished talking, there was a long and rather awkward silence. Donnie appeared to be struggling with something. For what seemed like a long time, he just stared at the feather I had handed him. He slowly rotated the plain white feather with his fingers. Then he gently set the feather down amid the clutter on his desk and flipped through the notes he had just taken.

After a few moments, he took off his glasses and rubbed his eyes. Next, he took a small handkerchief out of his shirt pocket and carefully cleaned each lens. After putting his glasses back on, he gazed out the window and then up to the ceiling, like he was searching for some kind of inspiration. Then he took a deep breathe. Finally, with some hesitation, he slowly began to speak

"Okay, let's see if I got this straight."

I looked at him hopefully, but he spent more time looking at his notes than at me as he continued, "A hundred years ago, there were these Indians who lived in Idaho and talked to trees. But they were all wiped out in a battle with the Army."

He looked up and I nodded my head. Then he continued, "So you went there last summer looking for a bunch of moths and ran into this old guy, who might be part Indian but we're not really sure ... anyway, this old guy owned a gold mine ... except that now the old guy is dead and the mine is owned by someone else.

"And inside this mine are these birds that glow in the dark ... except that the only one's who've ever seen them are this dead guy ... and you ... and your ex-girlfriend – and she says maybe she didn't see them after all." He paused for a moment to flip a page in his notes, then he continued ...

"And these glow birds somehow protect Old Growth Forests ... except that you don't know how they do that either.

"And now the only proof you've got that they even exist is this feather – which is supposed to glow in the dark – except that it doesn't glow any more." He looked up at me and I reluctantly agreed.

Then he resumed talking. "And somehow all of this ties in with hummingbirds and homeless kids and dinosaurs and dying salmon and ozone holes and global warming and mass extinction of the whole human race ... and that's why you want me to write a story about it."

As he finished, his face had a pained and puzzled look. I just sat there quietly.

"Kid," he paused for a moment to find the right words. Then he just shook his head and stated flatly, "You're crazy."

"It does sound kind of bad, doesn't it?" I offered apologetically.

"Bad!" he looked out the window, "Kid, where I come from, they'd lock you up for that kind of nonsense. I'm sorry Dave ... I wish I could help you out ... but my editor would have my neck if I turned in a story that wild. "

I was near tears. I didn't know what else to do. Donnie was my last hope. I guess he could see that I was desperate because he went on ...

"Look, Dave ... I'd like to help you. I really would. I like birds as much as the next guy – but this – Listen, if you just had some solid evidence that what you're saying is true ... why, I could get your story on the front page of every paper in the country by tomorrow morning. But as it is, well, I'd be the laughing stock of the whole news room."

"What kind of evidence do you need?" I asked.

"How 'bout one of those glow-birds. You bring one of those babes in here ... and if you can get it to glow, why, I'll write anything you want ... and that's a promise. But it's really up to you."

Donnie walked me back to the elevator and then he said, "If I were you, I'd get on the next bus out of town and get me one of them glow birds ... Bring it back here and then we can talk."

I shook his hand and said "Thank you, Mr. Walker."

He smiled and said, "I thought I told you, none of that Mr. Walker stuff. My name is Donnie." As the elevator door closed, he added, "Good luck kid."

* * * *

Once again, I found myself on the bus to Salmon Falls. Only this time I had a feather in my pocket, and a renewed sense of purpose in my heart. "Surely, there must be a way," I thought, "and if I just keep trying ... perhaps I can find it."

After I checked into the boarding house, I walked over to the Hardware Store. Paula was there ... still feeding her birds. She seemed surprised but happy to see me.

"Well, if it isn't Lou's friend. What's your name? Dave ... that's right. What brings you back here?"

I told her that I had to go back to Lou's mine and she replied, "You must not have heard. You can't go up there anymore. They've got the entire area blocked off for miles. They're going to blow that whole mountain up any day now."

"What you mean 'blow the whole mountain up'?"

"I mean what I said. It's right here in the paper. Read it yourself."

Paula handed me an obviously old and beat up copy of the local paper and there it was – right on the front page. The Forest Service had approved a plan to completely blow up the highest peak in the Border Range Wilderness! The paper said the access road to the trailhead was closed and that blasting would begin in about a week. I looked at the date on the paper. It had been printed several days ago.

"I have to find a way to get up there," I said. "Isn't there anyone who could help me out? Someone who might know another way into those mountains?"

"Well," Paula replied, half in protest, "if anyone does, it would be my nephew Paul. He's a climber and he used to go out to those mountains all the time. But it would be crazy to try and go out there now."

"How can I get a hold of your nephew?" I interrupted.

"Well, he works for me part-time. In fact, he's up in the attic right now fixing the store sign, but there's no way ..."

I interrupted her again and begged "Please, can't I at least talk with him?"

She walked to the far corner of the store and shouted up through a hole in the ceiling. "Hey, Paul! Come down from there! Someone's here who'd like to talk with you!"

A muffled voice from above replied, "Just a second ... I almost got it. Okay Auntie, turn the switch. I think the sign will work now."

Paula flipped the switch on the fuse panel ... and there was a puff of smoke as the whole store went dark.

"Not again," Paula sighed (up in the attic I could hear some muffled cursing.)

"I guess that wasn't it." said the voice from above. "Flip the switch back."

As Paula flipped the switch and the lights came back on, I heard her say, to herself more than to me, "Never hire family for a job you really need done."

Paul came down the ladder apologizing, "Sorry, Auntie, I'll get it next time." Then he looked up at the hole in the ceiling and added, "I hope it holds. Those wires up there weren't quite long enough ... so I got 'em clipped together with a coat hanger."

Paula rolled her eyes and said, "I just hope this place doesn't burn to the ground in the meantime. Course as slow as it's been lately, it wouldn't make much difference if it did."

I walked toward them and commented, "Excuse me."

"Oh, I'm sorry," Paula said. "This fellow here would like to talk with you."

"You want to talk with me?" Paul asked nervously. "Why, did I do something wrong?"

Paul was a young man, in his late teens or early twenties. He had long dark hair he kept in a pony tail and his clothes were old and tattered. He reminded me of pictures I had seen of hippies in the nineteen sixties.

"No, nothing wrong." I replied. "Your Aunt tells me you know the Border Range Wilderness."

"I ought to ... " Paul smiled confidently, "I spent enough time up there."

"Listen," I asked, "could we go over to the cafe and talk for a while?"

Paul replied sheepishly, "Only if you're payin'. I'm kind of broke right now."

I wasn't much better off myself. Fortunately, Paula rescued us both as she smiled and offered, "Listen, it's about dinner time. Why don't you two boys join me?"

Following Paula to a small room at the back of her store, we sat down at a table in one corner of the room as Paula prepared dinner at a stove in her small kitchen.

"Paul," I began, "I have a problem. I need to get to the mountains above old Lou's cabin ..."

"Man," Paul protested, "you must not read much. That entire area is restricted. They're gonna blow the whole place up any day now. That's where they found all that gold ..."

Paula said from the stove, "I tried to tell him Paul."

Then his eyes brightened as he continued, "Say, you aren't thinking about going up there to steal some gold are you?"

"No, not at all," I said. "I ..."

"Gee, that's too bad. I might be interested in a project like that!"

"Look," I tried to redirect the conversation, "there are these birds up there that are very special. Have you ever heard of gypsy moths?"

"Of course I have," Paul said indignantly. "My Dad's a laid off logger. There's only one thing he hates worse than spotted owls and it's gypsy moths. Those moths are wiping out the forests all around here."

"Well, these birds eat gypsy moths. But if the mining company blows up the mountain, these birds will all be wiped out."

"Why's that?" Paul asked.

"Because the birds live in the same cave the gold is in," I replied.

"Even I know birds don't live in caves." Paul shook his head, "Besides, how do you know where that gold is?"

"Look," I said impatiently. "I just do."

"Well, excuuuse me!" Paul said sarcastically.

"I'm sorry." I apologized. "I simply need some help. I need evidence that these birds exist ... or no one is going to believe me. I've just got to get back there and capture one of those birds. Look," I complained, "I'm sorry I even brought it up. I can see you're not interested ..."

"Hey," he interrupted with a smile, "who said I'm not interested? Do you really know where the gold is?"

"I know about where it is ... but what I really need is one of those birds."

"Well, I'm not much interested in birds," Paul admitted. "but I could go for a little gold. I don't need a lot ... just whatever I could stuff in my pockets."

I looked at Paul. Then he smiled and continued, "What do you say? I get you up there – you get your bird – and I get some gold. Is it a deal?"

What else could I say? "It's a deal," I conceded.

As she walked toward the table with a tray of soup bowls and sandwiches, Auntie overheard our agreement and interjected, "Paul, you can't be serious about going up there. I heard they got the whole south side of the Range blocked off. They're guarding it with helicopters."

"No problem," Paul said, with a sandwich already in his mouth. "We'll go in from the West ... up the old road and over the top."

"In from the West? Up the Old Road? But Paul ..." Auntie protested, "that road's been closed since I was a child! Why the bridge is completely washed out! How you gonna get across the Salmon River?"

"I've gotten across it before," Paul said defensively.

"Maybe in the Fall when the river's low," Auntie said, "but this is Springtime ... There's no way across that river now. Even if you could get across it, what about the cliffs? The whole West side of the Range is nothing but cliffs."

"I know that," Paul protested, "but we can do it Auntie. I'll bring a rope."

"A rope," I said nervously. "I don't know how to use a rope."

"No problem," Paul smiled. "I'll teach you!"

Auntie was not at all happy with Paul's plan. As we ate dinner, she shook her head and said, "The way I see it, you boys don't stand a chance. They got twenty million dollars invested in that mine ... and you boys don't have enough money to buy your own dinner."

After we had finished eating, Paul asked how I planned to catch one of the birds. I meekly said I hadn't really thought about it much. Then, Auntie offered to loan me a small bird cage and a package of bird seed. She said, "If you're gonna get your heads blown off, you might as well take this old bird cage with you."

Paul laughed and said, "You're gonna try to catch a bird with that?"

"You got any better ideas?" his Aunt replied.

Paul turned to me and said quite seriously, "Not really, but listen Dave, let's be clear about our deal – I get some gold whether you catch a bird or not, right?"

"Yeah," I conceded, "but also we turn around once we got the bird – whether we've found the gold yet or not ... Fair is fair."

Paul laughed confidently and said, looking at the cage his Aunt had placed on the table, "Not much chance of that."

We shook hands and agreed to meet in front of the store at dawn the next morning.

* * *

Just after sunrise, I got to the Hardware store and found Paula waiting inside. The clock on the wall said 6 a.m. She offered me coffee which I politely declined and we quietly waited for Paul to arrive.

Paula seemed nervous. After a while, she looked directly at me and said quite seriously, "Listen Dave, I have a bad feeling about this whole plan. I don't know if this is such a good idea. I'm afraid you're both gonna get killed."

"But Paula," I insisted, "I can't just let them wipe out the Snow Birds. You yourself said that birds are part of our early warning systems ... and didn't Lou say ..."

"I know," Paula conceded as she interrupted me, "they're like the canaries in a coal mine. But neither I nor Lou would want you to go out and risk your neck over it."

"It's not just because of you and Lou," I stumbled and paused, searching for the words. Then I continued, "Back when I was in the hospital, I met a nurse and a group of homeless kids. They called themselves the Salmon Savers. They taught me a lot ... about things like caring and having hope."

"So, you're here because of those kids?" she asked.

"It's not just that either," I struggled, trying to find the right words, "We're reaching a point where we need to turn things around. We need to start protecting our environment instead of destroying it. Almost everyone I talk to knows that, but they just don't think it's possible. I feel like, if I can find a way to save the Snow Birds, then maybe people might see it's possible to start saving everything else – and begin to have hope."

Paula shook her head and said, "I don't know which sounds more impossible ... a group of homeless kids trying to save the salmon, or you and Paul trying to save the Snow Birds. But I know this – it's going to take a lot more than homeless kids and a college student if we're going to put a dent in our environmental problems."

We both sat there quietly for a few minutes. Then I offered, "But what if a whole bunch of kids and all kinds of college students decided it was important?"

"Dave," Paula replied, "The problem is you kids just don't have any clout. When you get down to it, it's the Mountain Mining Company that has all the money and all the power. That's why you kids don't have a chance. It's money and greed that wins out every time."

"Not every time. I read in my history book back in High School about a time that greed didn't win out over what was right."

"When was that?" Paula asked.

"Thirty years ago, back in the sixties."

"Oh," Paula sighed, "You mean the anti-war movement."

"Wasn't that just a group of kids who decided to stand up for what was right. A lot of them were clubbed by police. Some were even killed. But they managed to stop an unjust war."

Paula smiled and said, "Those were the good 'ole days, back when folks believed in something besides making money."

"That's what I mean." I smiled back. "If it happened before, it can happen again. That's why we have to have hope. Once people realize we're waging an unjust war on our own environment, they will demand that the slaughter and destruction be stopped."

After a while, Paula asked, "Those homeless kids really think they can save the salmon?"

I shrugged my shoulders and replied, "You have to start somewhere."

Looking out the window, Paula remarked, "When I was a small child, my father took me down to the Salmon River one day to watch the salmon pass by. I can still remember that morning. Those salmon were huge. My father said every one of them weighed more than eighty pounds. There were so many of them. To me, it looked like there were more salmon in the river than there was water! Why it looked like the whole river had changed direction and was slowly moving upstream ... millions of salmon."

She turned away from the window as she continued, "I read in the paper that only a few salmon came back last Spring. It was a small article, not even on the front page. The article said that, between the logging fouling up their spawning grounds and the dams and water pollution and all, soon there might not be any salmon left in the Salmon River."

"Then, just a month ago, there was an article which said that Mountain Mining had dumped all kinds of cyanide into the Glacier Fork killing almost all of the fish. When I read that article, it just about broke my heart; but no one else in town even seemed to care."

"But Paula," I protested, "that's just Salmon Falls. When I was in the hospital, I read about the dumping. It was on the front page in Seattle. I also read about a survey that showed over 80% of all Americans were opposed to dumping poisons in the river and were in favor of protecting the environment. I bet even folks in Salmon Falls would be in favor of protecting the environment if they knew that those poisons might eventually harm them and their own children."

"But they don't know." Paula sighed.

"You're right Paula, they don't know," I continued, "and that is not only the problem, it's also the solution. That's why I need to get a Snow Bird. It's to make people aware of the destruction that's going on around us. The first step in solving any problem is awareness that a problem exists. If people only knew about the terrible things that are being done, I believe they'd want to help change things. But if the Snow Birds are simply blown up, then no one will ever know."

That's the reason I have to take this risk ~ it's because this is not just about saving Snow Birds. It's about saving everything they represent ... and that includes saving us."

Paula looked out the window for a few minutes. Then she came over to me and put her hand on my shoulder and said, "I hope you find your Snow Bird."

* * *

At 7 a.m. I suggested maybe we should give Paul a call. Paula said, "He doesn't have a phone." I asked where Paul lived and she replied, "A few miles out of town. He lives with his Dad, my sister's husband. Paul never has been very reliable when it comes to time and getting things done. I guess that's what happens when a boy raises himself."

Paula picked up a picture that was on the counter next to her cash register and continued, "His mom passed away when Paul was five ... His Dad was always out logging ... and I never had much time for him what with this store and all.

"My sister named him after me ... and the kids at school always teased him about being named after a girl. I imagine that's why he spent so much time out in those mountains."

Just then Paul road up in a small but very loud motorcycle. He carried a rope over his shoulder ... and we went out to meet him.

"Sorry I'm late." Paul said as he got off of his bike. "I had a hard time getting the bike started, but it's going now and running great!"

Just as he said that, the bike suddenly shook, stalled and stopped.

"Oh man, not again." Paul moaned painfully. He adjusted a lever on the motor and kicked hard on the starter with his foot. The bike shook and started with a bang, releasing a cloud of smoke that filled the air.

As the smoke cleared, Paul said, "We better get going. Hop on!"

I put my backpack (with birdcage attached) on my shoulders and sat on the bike behind Paul. There was barely enough room on the seat for both of us.

Paul said, "Hang on tight!"

As we left, his Aunt waved good-bye and shouted "You boys be careful. God be with you!" What we didn't hear was her final phrase, "You're gonna need him."

We must have been quite a comical sight as we rode out of the nearly deserted little town. Two improbable heroes and a bird cage off to do battle with the evil empire ... on a bike that could barely hold our weight. In a way, it was good there was no one else in that sleepy little town to see us.

But at least we were trying. As we traveled those first few miles down the Old Road, I thought to myself how great it felt to finally be doing something right now, instead of just talking about doing something or hoping to do something in the future.

"No," I thought "no more talking. This time was for real. We were finally on our way."

What a great feeling of elation that was ... with the Salmon River below us ... and the high mountains all around us ... and a feeling of purpose and determination ... and hope.

At least, it was a great feeling for a while ... until we passed an old large yellow sign which read:

WARNING!
ROAD ENDS, 1/4 MILE
BRIDGE WASHED OUT

We reached the point where the pavement came to an abrupt halt ... and so did we. As we looked out over the Salmon River where the bridge used to be, I said the obvious, "Paul, we can't possibly get across this."

Paul didn't say anything. He just sat there and stared hard at the raging torrent directly below us.

Finally, he said with an unexpected tone of determination, "Hang on!"

Before I could even ask why, we were suddenly plunging down the bank toward the river below ... at full speed!

I shouted, "Paul, I can't swim!"

He replied, "That's okay. Neither can I!"

At that very moment, we hit the river ... and there was water spraying everywhere. I couldn't see a thing. All I could do was hang onto Paul. The water was so deep, I was sure the bike would stall ... but somehow it kept going ... and somehow Paul kept control of it. In seconds, we were on the other side and the little bike was climbing the bank. Before I knew it, we were back on the road. Paul was whooping and hollering and I was shouting, "You did it! You did it!" We were both waving our arms and shouting as the little bike continued up the mountain road.

The road now got a lot bumpier, but neither of us even noticed. We were both still celebrating the sheer thrill of victory. It was a miracle. We had faced certain defeat and, as if we had walked on water, we had come away winners. During that brief happy interval, it simply didn't matter what trials and disappointments might lie ahead ... because in that rare moment in time we had achieved success.

It was one of life's most important lessons ... that if you just keep on believing and you keep on trying, you can make it past any obstacle.

For the first time in my life, I knew for sure that I was on the correct path. The road in front of us positively glowed in the sunlight. Brightly colored flowers lined both sides of our path and filled the air with their fragrance. Birds seemed to be sitting in every tree and they sang a chorus welcoming us to their domain. It was like they had been waiting for our arrival and were cheering us onward! I knew then as we slowly made our way up that road that, if there was a way, we would find it. If there were any Snow Birds left, we would find them too.

* * *

The ever-narrowing road continued to get worse as we rode around several more wash-outs during the next hour. Our celebration had finally ended as Paul tried to concentrate on the best way to navigate the bike around a continuous series of pot holes, large rocks and small streams.

We had already gotten off of the bike several times to get around downed trees. But by the second hour, we were spending almost as much time off of the bike walking as on the bike riding.

Then it happened. With me riding behind Paul, I couldn't see too much, but I felt the bike slowly come to a halt ... and Paul just sat there.

"What's the matter?" I asked. "Are we out of gas?"

"We might as well be." Paul said in disgust. "Look."

I got off of the bike and looked ahead. And there it was ... not just a wash-out ... but the whole road had caved away and fallen straight down to the river more than 100 feet below us!

"That's it." Paul said matter-of-factly.

"Are we turning around?" I asked ... not really knowing what else to say.

Paul looked at me kind of surprised and said, "I mean, that's it for the bike. From here on, we're walking."

"But Paul," I protested. "what about the wash-out? It goes down over a hundred feet. How are we going to get across it?"

"No problem." Paul said. "We'll go up!"

With that said, he got off the bike and started up the hill a few steps. Then he turned around and looked at me, still standing there with a look of disbelief on my face.

"Okay," he said, "I'll carry your pack ... but we're not turning around so we might as well get going." Paul took my pack, threw it over his shoulder and charged straight up the steep hill. What a sight he was; carrying a rope over one shoulder, the pack over the other and a bird cage dangling out the back. Even with all of that, I could barely keep up with him. Paul may have been meek and insecure in town, but he was an absolute superman of determination out in the mountains – an amazing sight to watch climb a hill. We climbed up for perhaps twenty minutes and reached a spot where we could safely traverse above the wash-out. Paul then led us back down to the road (or what was left of it) ... and we continued on, this time in a forced march ... up, and up ... and up.

I finally caught up to Paul and, feeling bad about the load he was carrying, I offered that I could take my pack back. Paul smiled and again said, "No problem." He handed me my pack and up the road we went.

During the next hour, the road quickly faded into a trail ... and the trail quickly faded into brush. After perhaps two hours of whacking our way through the brush (with Paul in the lead and doing most of the whacking), I finally got up enough courage to ask the question that had been uppermost in my mind ever since we had left Paul's bike ...

"Listen Paul," I said nervously. "Do you know where we are?"

"Sure," Paul smiled confidently. "I know this area like the back of my hand ..."
He held up his hand and added, "Well, like the front of my hand anyway."

"That's good," I said. "So, how much further do we have to go?"

"Well," Paul paused. "If we're lucky, it's only another couple of miles up this valley."

"And if we aren't lucky?" I asked.

"Then we're climbing up the wrong valley!" Paul laughed ... but I didn't see the humor in his joke.

During the course of the day, I had become completely confused as to the direction we were traveling. I knew we had started out heading west and that, after we crossed the river, we were going north. But since then the valley we were in had changed direction several times. Neither of us had a map, but I doubt if even that would have helped. The creeks, valleys and ridges seemed to be coming and going in all directions. It was no wonder the Lewis and Clark expedition got lost out here. Without Paul's help, I would have almost certainly suffered the same fate.

After another hour passed, we stopped for a short break to eat a quick snack.

"I don't get it." I said, "How do you keep track of where you're going?"

"It's like this." Paul was obviously growing impatient with my insecurity, "All the water spirals out from the central peak. The rivers don't go in a straight line. The key to finding your way is to think like a circle."

"Like a circle ...," I had a hard time grasping the concept.

"Yeah," Paul repeated, "The rivers wind around like a circle."

Paul was now smiling. I could tell he was happy with his explanation, but I was still confused. I decided to let the matter ride. "As long as Paul knew where we were heading," I tried to persuade myself, "I guess that's all that really matters."

During the next hour, the terrain got a little steeper as we continued to climb up higher and higher. Thankfully, the brush lessened and soon we reached the snow line. "A good sign." I thought.

Then we came over a small ridge and I was shocked to see an immense wall of vertical rock! A sheer cliff over a hundred feet high and extending in both directions as far as the eye could see.

Paul came up over the rise and smiled saying "Great, now I don't have to carry this rope any more ... it was beginning to get kind of heavy."

"Well," I thought "at least he wasn't bothered by the rock wall."

We hiked up the base of the cliff. Then Paul dropped the rope and got out a climbing harness. "Here," he said, "put this on."

"I don't know how," I replied.

"Look," Paul said as he got out an identical harness. "just watch me and do the same thing."

In a couple of minutes, we had our harnesses on. Paul tied me into one end of the rope and himself into the other. He then clipped a small round metal thing into the rope and clipped the other end of the device into my harness.

"This," he explained, "is a belay ring. If I start to fall, you pull the rope tight like this."

"How," I asked, "will I know if you start to fall?"

"Oh, you'll know ... " he smiled. "For one thing, I'll be screaming and cussing at the top of my lungs."

"Okay," he asked. "Are you ready?"

"Ready?" I protested. "I thought you were going to teach me how to climb before we started."

"Yeah, well I changed my mind." Paul apologized. "We don't have time for the lesson anymore. It'll be dark in a couple of hours and we've got to be off of this cliff and up on that ridge before the sun goes down."

"But Paul," I objected, "I've never done this before."

"Okay," he sighed, "I'll tell you the three most important things about climbing. But we don't have much time so pay attention ..."

"First, stay calm. Keep taking slow deep breathes ... pretend you are relaxing at the beach. You'll climb a lot better if you're relaxed and loose than if you're all tense and nervous. Got that?"

"Right," I said, "RELAX."

"Okay," Paul continued, "the second thing to remember is to look with your eyes, and then feel with your hands, but to climb with your feet. Plan each move as you go up, looking for places to put your feet and feeling them with you hands, but then trust your feet and keep your weight over your feet. Got that?"

"Yeah," I said, "use my feet."

"Right ... now the third thing to remember is this - whatever else you do, don't look down! Got that?"

"Don't look down," I said. "Got it."

"Okay," he said, "here we go."

"Wait," I asked. "How will I know when it's my turn to start climbing?"

"Oh yeah," Paul said. "I forgot to tell you ... when you feel two sharp pulls on the rope, then you can start climbing."

With that, Paul took off, climbing up quickly. He was soon completely out of sight, leaving me to wonder what else he forgot to tell me during my one minute lesson on climbing!

The coil of rope laying beside me passed smoothly and quickly through the belay ring. Just as I was getting worried that the last bit of rope might pass through the belay ring, the rope suddenly stopped.

A couple of minutes went by ... nothing happened ... and I started to wonder, "What do I do if I don't feel two pulls on the rope? Damn - that's what he forgot to tell me!"

Just then, the signal came ... two pulls. It was my turn now. I took a couple of deep breaths, squeezed the Snow Bird feather I had in my pocket, and said a prayer. Then I started climbing.

To my relief, every time I took a few steps up, the slack in the rope would be pulled out by Paul, who was far above me. This ain't so bad," I thought. "Even if I fell, Paul would catch me." (Or so I hoped.)

As I went up, I'd take a couple of steps, and say out loud "relax". Then a couple more steps and say, "use feet." Then two more steps and say, "don't look down." In what seemed like no time at all, I was up with Paul.

He was on a large ledge between two big rocks. When I was safely on the ledge, Paul said, "See, climbing is easy, isn't it?"

I could hardly talk (either from fear or exhaustion.) All I could say was, "I can't believe people actually do this for a hobby."

Paul laughed and replied, "That's okay. I can't believe people spend their time studying gypsy moths!"

Then he clipped me into some cord he had looped around one of those rocks and said "Ready?"

"Ready for what?" I asked.

"Ready for another pitch?"

"Baseball pitch or sales pitch?"

"No, no ... " Paul explained. "Another climbing pitch. Each time you run out the rope, it's called a pitch. Are you ready?"

"How many of these pitches do we have to do?" I groaned in disappointment.

"Well, our rope is about 150 feet long; and this cliff is about 250 feet high. So I'd guess this next pitch will put us on top."

"TWO HUNDRED FIFTY FEET," I said slowly. "That's as tall as a twenty-five story skyscraper!"

"Yeah." Paul said as he started climbing, "that's why you don't want to look down."

As the rope again passed through the small belay ring, I stood on the ledge and said another prayer. If I could, I would have given up right then and there, but it was too late for that now. So instead, I just prayed, "God, please watch over Paul. Make sure he doesn't fall, because if he does, I wouldn't have a clue as to what to do next."

Fortunately for both of us, God came through and Paul didn't fall. In less than an hour, I joined him on the thankfully broad summit ridge.

What a view there was! We were looking down now on the glacier I had fallen into just a few months earlier. I could hardly believe my eyes. I could see now why people climbed mountains. From here, one could look at the world in a completely new and different way. The view in all directions was inspirational. Below me the valleys spiraled out from the main peak exactly as Paul had described earlier in the day. To the south, I could see the Salmon River Valley and the town of Salmon Falls. Way off in the west, I could see the deep canyon of the Snake River. Directly to the north of that was a series of ant hills that I realized must be the Palouse Foothills. Somewhere out there, I thought, was the State University. It was incredible to see how far I had come in the span of one long day ... and one short year.

But sight was not the only one of my senses that had changed. There was a steady breeze coming from the east and I felt as if the wind on this ridge was blowing completely through my soul. I could actually hear the mountain's song. Tears came into my eyes. Paul gave me a hug. All I could say was, "Thanks."

Paul said, "Hey, don't thank me, you got the tough part. I got us up here. Now you have to find the cave where the gold is, I mean, the birds are in."

I looked around and saw what looked like several caves. Not far from where we were was a fairly large one ... if we could just get to it.

Just then, we heard the thunderous roar of a large helicopter. "Run for it!" Paul shouted, as we both dove into the large cave moments before the helicopter passed over head.

My heart was pounding with fear. Then, I saw it ... the remnants of a very old box of Graham Crackers!

"This is it!" I whispered.

Paul said, "Don't be so pessimistic. I don't think they saw us. We're still okay"...

"No," I explained. "I don't mean this is it as in we're dead ... I mean this is the cave the gold is in!"

"Really?" Paul's eyes brightened. "How do you know?"

"Look," I said as I held up the crumpled remains of the graham cracker box.

Staring at me like I'd lost my marbles, Paul asked, "What do graham crackers got to do with gold?"

"It's a long story." I replied. "Just trust me ... this is it!"

We went a little further back into the cave.

Paul led until it started to get dark. He then turned to me and said, "I can't see."

I pulled a flashlight out of my pack.

"Good idea." Paul said as I passed by him and took over the lead. "That big pack of yours paid off after all."

The cave went up hill slightly, around the corner and then split into two. I called back to Paul, "Which way?"

He replied, "You pick."

We took a few more steps down the branch to the right and Paul whispered, "Dave ... stop ... I think I hear something."

Then I heard a loud "crash!" behind me. I waited a minute in total silence.

Then I whispered, "Paul?"

No answer.

I whispered a little louder, "Paul ... are you all right?"

Then I heard another "CRASH!" Only this time it was inside my head.

The last thing I remember thinking was, "Dynamite! Someone is blasting dynamite!"

Chapter Fifteen ... Secrets of the Snow Birds

*If one advances confidently in the direction of his dreams,
And endeavors to live the life which he has imagined,
He will meet with success unexpected in common hours.*

Henry David Thoreau

It was very dark. My head hurt real bad. Slowly, I remembered the dynamite blast. "Now, I'm dead for sure," I thought. "Maybe I'm dead already. That's it ... I'm dead and I'm a ghost. Never gonna get a Snow Bird now. Well, I guess that 'earthly' stuff doesn't matter anymore."

Then I smelled something ... something bad. "Maybe it's just my own rotting corpse." I thought. But the smell was strangely familiar ... like someone who hadn't taken a shower in months. "Lou?" I wondered. "If it is, then I know I'm dead."

Something else was wrong, because I wasn't in the cave anymore ... or was I? I had blankets wrapped all around me ... old military blankets ... and a bandage wrapped around my head. At first I thought I was back in Lou's cabin. Had I been dreaming this entire time? I tried to move my hand ... it moved. Then I heard a voice.

It was Paul. He said, "I think he's coming around."

Then another voice, saying, "That kid sure has a fragile skull. He was out all night."

It was Lou ... It WAS Lou!

I tried to sit up. "Lou!" I shouted, then, as I winced in pain, I lowered my voice and asked, "Lou, what are you doing here?"

"A better question kid is, what are you doing here?"

"But Lou, you're supposed to be dead!"

"Yeah," Lou replied, "and as far as you're concerned, I am dead – and don't you forget it!"

"But Lou, your letter and ... "

"Listen kid, it'd take more than a few jackals in a helicopter to bump off old Lou. I outsmarted 'em and staged my own death. It was the only way I could figure to get them monkeys off my back – cost me my best hat too!" Then Lou smiled and tapped the Filson hat on his head, "Fortunately, I had a spare."

"Lou, it's really great to see you!" I smiled.

"Yeah ... well then tell me what the hell you're doing here ... "

Lou had not lost any of his abrupt charm and I grinned as I answered his question, "I've come to save the Snow Birds, Lou."

"Oh, yeah ... and how you figure you're gonna do that, kid?"

"I've got this trap ... a bird cage actually ... and some bird seed. I'm gonna try to catch a Snow Bird. If I can prove they exist, I might be able to stop the mining."

"Catch one you say?" Lou looked at the bird cage. "Well, you won't catch one with a trap like that. These ain't no flatland birds ya know ... they're smart birds. They'd never fall for something as obvious as that trap."

"But, Lou," I protested. "I've at least got to try. We've come so far and been through so much. It's really our only hope now."

"Only hope, eh?" Lou smiled. "Well, I think I know a better way. Follow me."

We followed Lou back deep into the cave ... where it got darker and darker and then ... there they were. Maybe a hundred or more glowing lights, filling the cavern ahead of us with their glow. A whole flock of Snow Birds in a room made of gold!

Lou whispered, "Wait here ... we wouldn't want to scare them, you know."

Lou went ahead into the Snow Bird cavern and in a moment, he came back with a glowing Snow Bird on his arm. The bird, which up close looked like a small white dove, was calmly eating something that Lou was holding up in his other hand.

Then Lou whispered, "Will this bird do?"

I whispered in amazement, "Lou, how did you do that? How did you catch it?"

"Easy," Lou smiled, "these birds have a craving for Graham Crackers ... I've been feeding them for years. You didn't really think all them boxes in that metal storage locker were for me, did you?"

I smiled as Lou continued, "Friendly little birds, aren't they?" The glowing bird just sat on Lou's arm and cooed.

I took a step forward and reached out to touch the special bird, but stopped when the bird backed away and hopped up onto Lou's shoulder.

"I guess it'll take a while for him to get used to you," Lou said. "Maybe it's a good thing you brought that bird cage of yours after all!"

The bird stayed on Lou's shoulder as we walked back to the lantern that marked Lou's quarters. Then he carefully placed the bird in the cage and gave him some more graham crackers.

I mentioned that the graham crackers looked awfully good ... so Lou offered me a box. I then thought better of it and said, "Save it for your birds, Lou. I've got some food in my pack."

As we sat by the lantern and ate, I mentioned, "I still don't understand how these birds manage to eat all the gypsy moths ... "

Lou laughed and said, "Didn't I tell you in my letter?"

"No, Lou ... I wish you had," I insisted.

Shaking his head, Lou said, "I must of figured it was obvious. Guess I forgot you were a flatlander and I had to spell it out ... "

"Spell what out Lou?" I asked.

"Well, kid," Lou explained, "ain't you ever seen a moth go to a light? Don't take no moth expert to know that moths like glowing lights. You see, the Snow Birds don't find the gypsy moths. It's really the other way 'round ... the gypsy moths all fly to the Snow Birds. The moths are attracted to the glowing! That's why the birds glow in the dark. It's too attract those gypsy moths!"

Once Lou had explained the secret of the Snow Birds, everything suddenly became perfectly clear. "Of course," I thought. "Why didn't I think of that?" Sometimes, a person can get so wrapped up studying the details that they overlook the obvious!

Paul said, "Listen, we better get out of here. They could start blasting any time."

"Are you coming with us?" I asked Lou.

"Not a chance!" Lou replied emphatically.

"But Lou," I protested, "They're gonna blow this whole mountain up."

"No they won't. Not until they know for sure where the gold is. Besides, the last thing I'd want to do is go hang out with a bunch of crazy flatlanders ... that'd kill me for sure! No, I'll stay here and watch out for my birds. Those guys in the helicopter have been getting closer to finding this place. I want to be here to greet them when they do!"

"Lou, you be careful," I said with concern.

"Hell," Lou said, "those guys aren't smart enough to kill off Old Lou. All that's motivating them is money. I got something more important motivating me; I got my pals here." Lou held out his hand and a couple of small glowing doves walked over to get some crackers.

Then Lou added, "Speaking of which ... you better take care of that bird I gave you. If he ain't back here inside of a week, I'm gonna come lookin' for both of you!"

It was a funny feeling rappelling back down the cliff with that bird inside the cage attached to my backpack. I wondered what the bird must have thought about our way of getting around. I'm sure he thought something like, "These humans sure are dumb. Flying is much easier."

As Paul slowly lowered me down the cliff, I thought to myself, "If that bird did think that, in a lot of ways, he'd be right. At the very least," I thought, "we humans are not as smart as we think we are."

* * * *

We all sat at a long table in the middle of a large stuffy room. Everyone was dressed up with suits and ties and such. Next to me was Donnie Walker, the Seattle Times reporter who had kept his promise and gotten the story in "every paper in the country." Next to Donnie was Rachel and her Salmon Savers, including Bobby and Lisa ... and Thomas. Donnie had written an article about the Salmon Savers in the Times, in addition to the Snow Bird article, and the kind citizens of Seattle had donated the money so they could all fly out to Washington for this important hearing. Then there was my climbing pal, Paul, and his Aunt Paula. Also there was Doc Hazelwood, who had officially documented the Snow Bird as a unique and Endangered Species. On the table in front of us in a large silver cage was a single white dove eating graham crackers.

There were perhaps a hundred people tightly packed into this room, sitting behind us and on both sides of us. I had been told that several million Americans would be watching this event, which was being carried live across the nation on public television.

Someone said, "All rise."

When we did, a stately looking older gentleman walked in through the door in the front of the room and said, "Please be seated." Then he continued ...

"Ladies and Gentlemen ... members of the press ... and my respected colleagues present at this meeting. We are here to determine whether the license granted to the Mountain Mining Corporation under the terms of the Mining Act of 1872 should be extended ... or revoked.

"We have with us today a young man who claims that this operation would threaten the existence of a new and Endangered Species of bird. These birds evidently feed on gypsy moths which, as you all know, have been destroying the Forests out West.

"There have been some amazing claims made about these birds. The media has done an incredible job of stirring public opinion regarding them. Just three days ago, I didn't even know they exist. Today even my own granddaughter is talking about them. (I looked at Donnie and he smiled.)

"Anyway," the Senator went on, "we have convened this emergency hearing in order to establish the truth about all this. I have been informed that all of you will have the opportunity to see for yourselves whether these claims are true."

The elder statesman then looked directly at me and said, "Son, for your sake, I hope this works."

He then paused and said, "Sergeant, will you please turn off the lights?"

The room gradually went dark, until it was as dark as the deepest forest. Then it began to buzz with hushed whispers.

Several moments passed as we all sat there in the dark ... and nothing happened. Soon, the whispers began to grow louder.

Why wasn't the bird glowing? I couldn't understand it.

What had gone wrong?

Was the room too warm?

Perhaps it was all the people and the poor bird was frightened. Whatever the reason, the room remained painfully dark.

Then someone behind me said they thought the whole story of a glowing bird was a hoax!

I began to get a sick feeling in my stomach. I suddenly realized how much was riding on this one moment. All at once, I saw that if this public demonstration failed, it could mean the end of the Snow Birds instead of their salvation.

As I sat there in the darkness, it dawned on me that this moment would decide not only the fate of the Snow Birds but also the fate of the Old Growth Forest that they protected ... and the fate of all the animals that lived in those forests.

I had made a big mistake. It wasn't fair of me to put so much pressure on a single Snow Bird – but it was too late now. The crowd of people behind me was growing increasingly impatient with every passing moment. Could it be that, after all I had gone through, I would fail in the end?

I was evidently not the only one who was becoming concerned. Next to me, I heard one of the Salmon Savers praying, "Please God, make it glow."

Then, like a gift from Heaven ... and ever so slowly ... it happened ...

The Snow Bird began to glow!

First faintly ... and then so brightly that it filled the whole room with light. So much light that, looking across the room, I could see the senior statesman who had convened the hearing ... and he was smiling!

"Friends," he said with a sigh of relief, "from what Doctor Hazelwood has told me, this bird is called an airethroptus. Once thought to be extinct, it now lives in some caves in Central Idaho. My young friend here calls it a 'Snow Bird' ... and my granddaughter calls it a 'glow bird.' But whatever it's called, I feel it deserves to have its home protected. In fact, I've been told in no uncertain terms that if its home is not protected, I myself might not be allowed back into my home tonight! So I'm hoping my esteemed colleagues will vote with me on this important issue."

The Senator adjusted his glasses as he picked up a sheet of paper and began to read...

"The destruction and pillaging of our nation's forests has gone on long enough ... far too long if you ask me ... and it is time we put a stop to it. Today, I have introduced a bill to the Congress of the United States which will rescind the Mining Act of 1872. This bill also includes provisions which will halt the subsidizing of wealthy timber companies and end the practice of giving away our nation's trees for pennies on the dollar. In addition, it contains provisions that require electric utilities to do whatever is necessary to restore the salmon runs of the Pacific Northwest. It is ridiculous that our Congress has continued to provide huge billion dollar subsidies to major corporations such as mining, timber and electric companies while cutting programs which feed homeless children and protect the environment. Finally, this bill contains a provision to establish the Border Range Wilderness as a Wildlife Protection Area ... so that our Snow Birds will be legally protected from harm of any kind. These Snow Birds belong to all of us and I believe they deserve to be protected."

At the end of the Senator's statement, the audience stood up and applauded. One by one, the other Senators present at the hearing reluctantly yielded to the obvious and overwhelming public sentiment. They too stood up and joined in the applause.

Thankfully, this was an election year. Even the coldest of politicians recognized a popular cause when they saw it. For at least this single day, everyone in Washington D.C. was an environmentalist.

The papers the next day carried the headlines, "Congress Passes Snow Bird Protection Act."



A Glowing Snow Bird

Chapter Sixteen ... Lou's Solution

*The voice of God spoke in the wind and thunder,
and the spirit of God flowed in every mountain stream
and the whole earth bloomed as a sacred place*
Joseph Campbell (The Power of Myth)

It has been several months since the news broke about the Snow Birds. The Old Growth Forest and the Border Range Wilderness have been officially designated as "Snow Bird Protected Habitat."

Donnie Walker wrote a series of articles in the Seattle Times about the plight of homeless children and the similar plight of our Northwest salmon. Together with Rachel, they established a community-based project to get more help for the salmon ... and for the Salmon Savers. Thomas is now working on getting his High School diploma. Rachel told me he wants to go to college and become a biologist.

As for Chris, I wish I could tell you that she changed her mind and we got back together. Unfortunately, that's just not the truth. I've called her a couple of times but, for reasons I still don't understand, she doesn't want to see me. She told me that she's trying to forget about the past and just get on with the rest of her life. She said she was happy about the Snow Birds. I tried to explain that it was because of her and her Starfish story that the Snow Birds now have a home ... but I guess that sometimes it's easier to save the entire planet than it is to save a single relationship. Still, I haven't given up hoping that maybe someday we'll be able to work out our problems.

As for me, I've spent the past few months doing a lot of reading ... not only about Old Growth Forests and Endangered Species, but also about the health of our whole world. I've come to see that our planet needs all the help it can get. So, I've decided to become an environmentalist. I guess that, in my heart, I was one all along. I just didn't know it until now.

Mountain Mining Corporation was required to rebuild Lou's cabin ... which became the official Snow Bird Park headquarters. In trade for Lou giving up his mining claim, Lou got a lifetime appointment as the Park's (and the Snow Bird's) official caretaker. In turn, Lou gave Paul the position of chief climbing guide and tourist "chaperone."

Even Salmon Falls was going through something of a mini-boom. An extra bus has been added just to bring in tourists from around the country. The bus, which is now called "the Snow Bird Express" goes between Salmon Falls and Spokane (where the nearest airport is) three times a day. This has led to a tremendous influx of bird watchers. The Audubon Society ran a special issue describing all the birds in the Border Range Wilderness. The booklet described over 100 different kinds of birds that one might see!

Everyone in town is now renting out rooms. The local campgrounds are filled for the first time in recent memory. Every store is selling "Snow Bird" knick knacks and other memorabilia. Even the gas station has a Snow Bird postcard display. But the most popular items of all are the little "glow-in-the-dark" ceramic Snow Birds being sold at Paula's hardware store.

Mountain Mining had applied for a permit to give "helicopter" tours, but was turned down by the Forest Service ... who decided that the birds might be disturbed by all the noise. While helicopters are out, groups can walk in and watch the birds with binoculars. They can even climb up and visit the Snow Bird Cavern, provided of course that they are accompanied by the official park "guide."

I hiked up to Lou's new cabin one afternoon to see how he was getting along. I found him outside talking to his new mule, which had been "given" to him by Mountain Mining to replace the one that had been "accidentally" shot.

It was a little odd to see old Lou wearing a new and clean Forest Service uniform. Fortunately he was still allowed to wear his old Filson hat.

"How's your new mule doing, Lou?" I asked.

"Not so good," Lou shook his head. "I think he's spent too much time down around those flatlanders."

"What's his name?"

"I've decided to call him Oats ... 'cause he sure eats enough of 'em".

The little mule nudged at the pail in Lou's hand ... and Lou continued, "But I guess I can teach him. Even a stubborn mule can learn, can't he?"

"Yeah, Lou." I smiled, "I think you can still learn."

"I wasn't talking about me." Lou scowled.

* * *

That night, I had dinner with Paul and Lou at the new cabin. It was a very nice cabin. Because it was the official park headquarters, it had been built completely to government codes and specifications ... including solar powered heating, lighting, plumbing and big insulated glass windows that offered a terrific view of the glacier and the Border Range Mountains.

As we ate dinner at a real table, Lou said, "I liked the old cabin better. It's hard to get used to the smell of this new place ... and if you spill something, you have to clean it up."

I asked Paul how the guide business was coming and he said, "Great! Those tourists are very polite and really interested in seeing not only the Snow Birds, but any of the birds we have up here. Unfortunately, Lou will only let me bring them up here once a week ... "

"Do the tourists disturb the Snow Birds that much, Lou?" I asked.

"Heck, no. The birds love having 'em up here. Why those tourists keep bringing 'em more graham crackers."

"Then what's the problem?" I asked.

"The problem," Lou explained, "is I don't want a bunch of crazy flatlanders up here ruining the place. They may not bother my birds that much, but they sure as heck get on my nerves. About once a week is all I can take!"

"I see," I smiled.

Paul leaned over and whispered, "I think Lou just doesn't want to take a shower more than once a week ... but I'm working on him."

After a bit, Paul asked, "So Dave, what's your plans? You know you're welcome to stay here at the cabin with us. There's an extra room and ..."

"Actually, Paul," I interrupted, "I'm thinking of writing a book on all this."

"A book!" Lou said, as if it was a dirty word. "A book!" he repeated, "Why would you want to do that?"

"Well," I said, "there's something I've been meaning to tell both of you ... but you've got to promise to keep it a secret. You see, I've figured out that the Snow Birds can't really save the forests ... at least not these Snow Birds."

"What do you mean?" Paul protested. "What about the gypsy moths ... I thought the Snow Birds ate them all."

"Paul, that part's true. The problem is that these Snow Birds only live in the highest places. They can't stop the gypsy moths that are destroying all the forests lower down in the valleys. For that we need a different type of Snow Bird. We need the kind of Snow Bird that can live in the low lands."

"A different kind of Snow Bird?" Paul asked, "But there isn't any other ... "

"Actually," I continued, "I've been studying this problem a lot the past few months ... and I've decided that Lou was right all along."

"Of course I was right!" Lou agreed, "What was I right about?"

"Lou, remember last year, when I first met you, you said the problem wasn't the gypsy moths ... "

"I did?" Lou asked and then he said, "Oh, yeah, I did!"

"You said the problem was that we kept chopping off the arms and legs of the patient and then wondering why the patient wasn't getting any better ..."

"You're damned right!" Lou said. "I remember now ... I was talking about those crazy flatlanders. They're the real gypsy moths. Why, they're worse than gypsy moths."

"You're right Lou," I agreed. "They are the gypsy moths ... because they are unknowingly creating the very conditions that the destructive moths can thrive in. But flatlanders can also become Snow Birds!"

"What do you mean by that?" Paul asked.

"Well, I think people just don't know they're acting like gypsy moths. They don't realize that they could be Snow Birds instead. Maybe if more people knew about this story, they'd want to help the Snow Birds and other Endangered Species. Maybe they'd be willing to work on saving Old Growth Forests ... and work toward a day when we'd all stop chopping off the arms and legs of our precious Mother Earth."

"Well, I'm for that!" Lou shouted.

"Me too, Lou." I continued. "Maybe we could get folks to realize that some things in this world are more important than green paper and yellow rocks. That's why I want to write the book ... to encourage people everywhere to become better caretakers of our environment ... to become Snow Birds instead of gypsy moths."

"Well, kid," Lou said. "You got my permission. Go ahead and write your old book ... and I hope it works."

"There's more Lou," I added. "I was also thinking we could start a club ... a free club for folks who want to work together to save Old Growth Forests and Endangered Species. We can call it the "Snow Bird Alliance" in honor of our friends up in the sky ... and I was hoping that you and Paul might want to become its first members."

Then Lou raised his eyebrows and smiled rather awkwardly, "Well, I've never been a member of a club before; but in this case, it would be an honor."

Paul smiled and said, "I think it's a great idea!"

And that was how Luther Muir, Paul Burger and myself, David Spring, became the founding members of the Snow Bird Alliance.

We shared a toast and, in the excitement of the moment, I added, "Who knows, maybe I can even persuade someone in Hollywood to make a movie about this!"

Lou got serious and said, "Now wait just a darn minute here. Books are one thing, but movies. Isn't that carrying things a bit too far?"

Paul said, "I think it's a great idea!"

Then, as Lou looked over at him with a scowl, Paul added, "But, of course, what do I know?"

* * *

After dinner, I walked outside into the warm stillness of the late summer night. Standing by the small stream that ran near the cabin, I paused and took a slow, deep breath. Before I could leave this mountain paradise, there was still one last thing I needed to do.

In the light of the rising full moon, I crossed over the stream and ascended the small hill on the other side. Climbing past the clump of trees that had hidden our tent so many months ago, I made my way up to the large flat rock where Chris and I had first seen the glowing birds.

It felt strange to be sitting there without her. We had spent so much time together on that knoll. I could still feel her presence ... both in that place and in my heart. Looking above the glacier, I saw the faint shimmering of Snow Birds. I knew they would be out flying around their mountain home tonight. Snow Birds always fly when the moon is full.

As I watched them, I whispered "We did it, Chris ... We tossed a starfish back in to the sea."

Then I took the Snow Bird feather out of my pocket. Despite its now crumpled condition, it was still a thing of beauty. I held the feather in my hands and looked at it one last time. I had carried it with me from the time I left the hospital. It had given me the courage I needed to climb the cliff. It had given me the faith I needed to keep on trying even when no one else believed. It did not need to glow. I knew how special it was. It had been a gift from the Snow Birds. Now the time had come to return the feather to them. These mountains were where the feather belonged. So I opened my palm and let a gentle breeze take the feather away. From this point on, I would have to make it on my own.

I was now ready to complete the task that had brought me back to this special place. My mission, you see, had to do with a book I had just finished reading. It gave a new and completely different accounting of the fate of the Nez Perce Indians.

In the book, there was an interview with one of the Dreamers. The interview took place around 1920. The Indian, whose name was Light in the Mountains, explained that the Dreamers had not been wiped out at the Canadian Border as the Whites had originally believed. The old Indian had been there that fateful day. Though he was only a small boy at the time, he remembered every detail and described the scene vividly.

The Dreamers were in a small ravine, just a few miles from the Canadian border, but completely surrounded by hundreds of soldiers. The army had surprised them in a sudden attack. A few of the Dreamers were killed, but the rest regrouped and drove the soldiers back. The soldiers however had managed to capture all their horses. The Dreamers now had no way to escape. The situation seemed hopeless. Chief Joseph raised the white flag and went out to negotiate with the soldiers. General Miles told Joseph the Dreamers could return to their homeland if they would lay down their arms and surrender. Joseph replied that he would discuss the offer with the other chiefs and let the General know their decision the next morning.

That night, the Dreamers held a meeting. With the leaders of the Dreamers circled around him, White Bird raised his hand and began to speak, "Here me my chiefs. I do not trust the General's offer. The White Ones are like small children who do not yet know the Sacred Way of the Dreamers".

The old Spirit Chief explained, "When I was a child, I had a vision. I saw a huge herd of buffalo laying dead on the prairie. The buffalo had been left there to rot. Only their skin had been removed. I wondered, how could this be? I knew no Indian could have done such a terrible thing to the sacred buffalo."

"Then," the chief continued, "I saw the mountains laying bare and lifeless. It's skin had also been removed – all the trees were gone. Only the stumps remained. I wondered, how could this be? Surely no Indian would ever do such a thing to our Sacred Mountains."

"Next, I saw the great river had stopped flowing. The water was completely still. The river had no life left in it. All the salmon had disappeared. Again I wondered, how could this be?"

"Finally, I saw huge floods, great winds and long droughts. Our Grandmother, the Earth became a hot, dry desert where nothing would grow and I wondered, how could this be?"

Then I heard a voice say, "It will be." I looked around, but no one was there.

The voice spoke to me again and said, "Remember this. When your people are losing hope, you must tell them what you have seen. Tell them I will protect them from danger. Tell them to walk the shining path. Take the Dreamers to the other side of the mountains and wait. Tell them they must have hope and be patient. A flower cannot bloom in the Winter, but must wait for Spring. Someday, after all you have seen has come to pass, the children of those who do these terrible things will be ready to learn. They will hear trees whispering in the wind and their hearts will begin to hear. They will see ghosts dancing in the moonlight and their souls will begin to see. When they come searching for the Sacred Way, then you can teach them with the power of your dreams. When the Spring of Life comes, then the earth will bloom again."

After White Bird had finished speaking, one of the other chiefs said, "I see the truth in what you say; but I am wondering how can we escape to the other side of the mountains when we have no horses and are completely surrounded by soldiers?"

White Bird replied, "Have faith my chiefs! When the sun rises, the Dreamers will become white and the Whites will become Dreamers! The Great Spirit will cause time to stop and the soldiers to fall asleep. He will light our way like a shining path and we will be free!"

The Dreamers decided to follow their old leader rather than trust their fate to the White Ones. Chief Joseph, who was the caretaker of the old and the ill, agreed to stay behind with those who were not strong enough to make the journey on foot.

The next morning, at dawn, protected by the deep fog of a light snow storm, over three hundred Dreamers taking almost nothing with them, silently walked past the sleeping soldiers. The wind blown snow covered their tracks as they made good their escape. The miracle took place exactly as White Bird had predicted. That is why the soldiers found barely one hundred Indians left when they entered the camp later that same morning.

After three days of walking, according to Light in the Mountains, the Dreamers approached the village of Sitting Bull. The great chief of the Lakota Sioux rode out on a big white horse to meet them. He had heard the incredible stories of how they had won battle after battle against the white soldiers.

At first there was an awkward silence as Sitting Bull stared at the ragged band of starving Indians. Then the chief got off of his horse and silently holding out the reins in his hand, he offered his horse to White Bird. The Dreamers had been saved!

This new version of the Dreamer story had filled me with hope. Maybe the Dreamers were still around, out there somewhere – living "on the other side of the mountains." Perhaps their story wasn't over after all. White Bird's vision might still come true.

This same book went on to explain a little about the Dreamer religion. The book said that, on a late summer night when the moon was full, the Dreamers would go out to their sacred mountains on a vision quest. There they would climb a high hill and sit on a large rock. Then they would spend the entire night awake ... looking and listening, thinking and feeling. They would open their heart and ask the Great Spirit to show them the way. It was a way the Dreamers called "the Sacred Way" and "the Path That Glows."

And there was one final thing about that book which spoke to me in a way I find hard to describe. It was a picture of White Bird taken around 1890 when he was a very old man. He was standing next to his teepee. And on the teepee, he had painted a large symbol. The symbol was the "Star of David".

I had this strange feeling like that picture had been taken just for me... as if White Bird was sending me a personal message across the depths of time. Could it be that White Bird was actually able to see the future? Why else would he have painted the star of David on his teepee?

Reading about the prophesy of White Bird had given me a new awareness. There was something much larger going on here and somehow I was a part of it. Like a link on some invisible chain, I felt a personal responsibility to pass White Bird's message on to others.

But as the Wooden People had once told me, before I could save others, I first had to learn how to save myself. This was the reason I had returned to the Border Range. I had come back here to learn what the Dreamers had learned. I had come back to find the Sacred Way. This night was to be my vision quest. I had come to sit on that rock and wait for the sunrise ... to look and to listen, to think and to feel.

That night, I had plenty of time to reflect on the past and to ponder the future. As I watched the Snow Birds guard that mountain they loved so much, I wondered, "Could we humans ever become as wise as those birds? Would we learn from our little feathered dinosaur friends how to protect this planet we live on? Or would we instead go the way of those bigger dinosaurs and become part of a mass extinction that we ourselves had created?"

Some things still seemed so hard for me to understand ... things like what kind of blindness has led us to destroy the very thing we need to survive ... all in the name of green paper and yellow rocks? When will we start to see the damage that has already been done? What will it take to get us to stop our war of destruction? And will we realize the danger and turn things around before it is too late?

So much had happened during the preceding year, not only to me but to the whole planet. Deforestation, ozone holes, homeless children. As I went over those events in my mind, I finally understood what Rachel had been talking about; how everything really was connected to everything else ... the Starfish Story, the Dinosaurs and Passenger Pigeons, the Snow Birds and the Salmon Savers. It was all becoming clear to me now. At last, I saw the connection.

I finally realized why the Snow Birds glowed. It was not merely, as Lou had thought, to attract the Gypsy Moths. Rather, it had more to do with a feeling.

"The thing that brings birds to sing
And makes the flowers grow.
The wisdom of the mountain dove
Is in a heart that glows."

That is the lesson the birds have learned. It is the lesson of love. That is why the Snow Birds glow. The glowing is really coming from their hearts.

This whole past year, I thought I was saving the Snow Birds. During that night, I realized it was the Snow Birds who are saving us. Like a light of hope shining in the darkness, the Snow Birds are showing us the way back to Paradise. Love is the connection. Love not only for our children and for other humans, but for all of God's creation.

Can it be that we humans were meant to learn from our friends, the birds, how to have hearts that glow? Hope may be the stuff that birds and dreams and stories are made of, but love is the glue that holds it all together. It seems to me a bit ironic that such diverse and complex problems can all have such a simple solution.

That night I saw a way we could still save this planet of ours. It was the Sacred Way of the Dreamers. The solution had been there from the start. It was in a phrase I had learned as a child, "and the glow of love in their hearts became the light of salvation for the entire world."

I no longer feared the darkness. Instead, I felt more like a long lost child who had finally found his way back home. This mountain was my home; and these trees and their wildlife – they were my brothers and sisters.

In a few hours, the sun would break over the horizon and the birds again would sing their sunrise song. It was a song they had been singing for a million years. "Someday," I thought, "if I listened hard enough, maybe I could learn to sing it with them."

Sunrise, the book had explained, was a sacred time for the Dreamers. It was a time of visions – of waking dreams. It was a time of new hopes and new beginnings.

Like the Snow Birds, the sunrise was a gift from the Great Spirit, the giver of warmth and of life. I realized that night would be the end of the Snow Bird story; but for the Snow Bird Alliance, the dawning of the new day would be just the beginning.

*Picture of White Bird
Standing next to a teepee
On which he has painted
The Star of David*