

Autobiographical Notes

“Poor Ornery People Like You and Like I”

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Years before, a sobering event had captivated me – sobering to me at least. In the fall time of a particular year, perhaps when I was around eight or nine, my dad informed my older brothers and I that we would be going to a men and boys retreat sponsored by the church. Great! We were going to be camping up in the mountains. I was definitely excited. Climbing and exploring in the Colorado Rockies was what I liked best.

Unfortunately, once we arrived at camp, it seemed dad kept getting after me to “settle down.” Simply put, I was a bit ornery. I just couldn’t seem to help myself. Other dads got after me as well during the weekend retreat to help curb my annoying antics. That tended to detract from the campout for all of us I am sure. I know it did for me.

Still, I liked running up and down the mountain trails and skipping rocks in the stream that ran by our camp. One of the dads showed everyone how to make whistles from twigs by carefully slipping off the bark of a relatively short section of a limb, carving a slight notch in the wood, and then replacing the bark. That spontaneous activity proved of great interest to everyone, and by nightfall we all had a whistle.

On Sunday all of the boys were instructed to form a line and walked quietly behind a few of the dads. For some reason unknown to me I just kept jabbering: “Why?” “Where are we going?” “How long will we be gone?” “Can I take my stick?” “Hey, he kicked me?” And so on. Amazingly, the dads were patient with me and just kept reminding me to be quiet.

After a seemingly long hike we came to a clearing surrounded by a dense stand of golden quaking aspen and a few fir trees. Streams of sunlight shown in upon us, bathing us with warmth. Then we heard it. A song. Someone was singing. I wasn’t sure who it was. But I thought I recognized what he was singing. Something about “poor ornery people like you and like I.” That sure described me, I thought. I began to stand still, silently listening, as he continued.

It sounded like he was getting closer. I finally recognized the song from a phonograph record we had back home recorded by Ed Ames, the well know actor from the Long Ranger television show. It was “I wonder as I wander,” an old Appalachian folk song. I listened intently. Soon our singing minister appeared through the trees. It was Lynn Weldon, one of Roy Weldon’s sons. He had a fantastic voice. The way he sang and the message of that song held me captive – a scene that is still present in my mind to this day.

After brother Weldon finished singing, the adults did something unfathomable to me. In a few words as possible they instructed us to leave just as we had come, quietly and in single file –

perhaps there was a prayer, but not much more, at least not that I can remember. I wanted to do something, say something in response. I hated to leave.

Why couldn't we stay? What touched me back there? Why did that song, that setting, quiet me so – at least for the moment? I reflected on these and similar thoughts as we packed up and drove home.

Sometime after we returned home I played the song on the record player. While it didn't have quite the same effect, it reminded me of the small, sunlit meadow, and the beautiful fragrance that had met us there. It seemed something had been invested deep within me, something bigger than my immaturity, something that overshadowed me. It was accompanied by a hope for more contact with what had pervaded our midst that day in the clearing.