

Boys

It is good to be a boy.

I suppose most men in today's society must choose to be a man or a child. My choice to be a man was in many ways made for me. If I really had a choice I'd choose to be neither. I'd choose to be a boy. A boy is not a child. He is a creation ... or a re-creation.

I have found boys everywhere, but I haven't found them often. Spiritual retreats I've attended over the years come to mind. Many were held in old monasteries and former residential schools where years ago adolescent young men preparing for the priesthood were boarded to protect them from "the contagion of the world." Myself, I enjoyed contagion at that age.

On nights during a retreat we men slept in the old dorm rooms, each with twenty or so beds, small pallets not truly made for comfort. We didn't mind. Though in our forties and fifties and older, we continued to banter after the lights went out, kidding each other about our small faults and telling jokes until mostly everyone dropped off to sleep. Then, someone would fart and we'd be at it once more until ten minutes had passed and we were again quiet, happy youngsters drifting off to our dreams. For a weekend we were boys again, hearts edged with laughter.

In the morning we found ourselves happily cut off from the incessant bother of the world. We began a day's work on what I suppose was for each of us a path to maturity and wisdom, a path that isn't complete without a spiritual component. A path most men might not recognize. Only a boy can find it.

It is good to be a boy. Boys are interested in experience, not creeds. Creeds are made by men for children. Boys are at home with uncertainty and surprise, and so are more likely to find their own guidance. As boys, we easily sense wisdom, and at the same time wisdom can make us boys.

I remember a dream I had in my early twenties. I was with a group of men as we crossed a bright green pasture. Coming to the edge of a wood, we entered on a path we hoped would take us to a refreshing waterfall that we'd heard of and wanted to explore and enjoy. I felt awkward and a bit guilty, thinking I should be busy with men's work, with aims more serious than rambling through the countryside on a summer day. Then I looked around and saw in the dream we had all become boys.

An intriguing object lay ahead of us, just off the path and next to a tree. It seemed a marvel and totally captured our imaginations. I could see only small parts of it in my dream, never the whole. Its bright metal parts and latches and gears and small wheels appealed to my young boy's heart, more so than a treasure chest of gold and silver. But when we began to excitedly speak of it, I realized none of us saw exactly the same thing. Wondering what the object was, we began to guess who made it and what it was used for and how it got there. Anyone's opinion was fair. Some ideas were serious, some quite funny, and we found ourselves laughing both in agreement and in disagreement. We'd seen nothing like it before.

No one claimed any special knowledge of "the Wisdom." That's what we began to call the object, because boys name things with phrases that pop into their heads and words that sound important. Of course, some boys were adamant about the purpose of the Wisdom, but we recognized that none of us knew for sure.

The sun reached its zenith high above us. It was time to get on with the journey. No boy in the dream thought to take the Wisdom for himself, to own it and keep it on his dresser or next to his bed at night like a favorite baseball glove. It was somehow apparent the Wisdom belonged where we found it, by the wayside on the journey, always there for anyone to appreciate. The Wisdom appeared to have no purpose, and seemingly nothing to reveal. But it awakened our wonder and our sense of delight. And one more thing. The Wisdom had made us boys again.

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