

Rivers and Lakes, Mountains and Oceans

Once, long ago, I dove into the water, into the cold, into my fears ... and ... I floated to surface and I swam, thrashing, across the small bay to a far shore and climbed out upon a rock, into the warm sun. I became a boy. I looked up and saw across the little bay a bigger lake and I determined that someday I would go there.

Not long after that I learned to paddle and I could go out into that lake, much further than I could swim. To be a Canadian you have to be able to paddle in the big lake. And so I became.

Paddling across the big lake, I discovered wind, far stronger than me in my canoe. The wind made me stronger just for trying. Sometimes the wind was tender and sometimes cruel. The waves were the fingers of the wind. The wind was spirit of the lake.

And so I learned to sail, to fly with the spirit of the lake, further and faster than I could ever paddle. And so I discovered there were other lakes and I started the journey to manhood.

I traveled from lake to lake with my friends, paddling by day and sleeping in the great darkness. In each new lake I dove and swam across each new bay and climbed on sunny rocks. Each new lake was a new birth and a new horizon.

Between these lakes were rivers, sometimes swift and rocky, sometimes slow and shallow. A river was to me just the way to another lake. A river had no wind and thus no spirit. A river has no horizon. I have friends who think more highly of rivers for reasons they have tried, without success, to explain.

And so, if as it seemed, I had mastered the lake in both its wildness and its stillness, in the bright sun and its darkness, then I determined I would take my chances on the ocean. What was the ocean but the largest lake, the greatest wind, the grandest darkness and the brightest stars. If I became a man by mastering the lake, what would I become when I submitted myself to the ocean?

I sailed in the sea, driven by the insatiable wind, tossed and clinging to the precarious sail, wild with terror, now slave to a power beyond control and a vastness beyond imagination, a puny child again. For there was no far shore. And I paddled a kayak on the ocean in some sweet quiet moments of her infinite power, a tiny cork bobbing unnoticed but totally at one with that simple and awesome power.

In that ocean are gathered all the lakes that ever were and all the lakes that I mastered as a boy and I became the slave. And so here was where my ashes in death might be re-united with the mother, forever to be content. This much I learned.

And then I asked, where does this water of life come from, what is the source ? And I determined to go hence, into the mountains.

Hiking high in the Himalayas I could see higher yet to the glaciers. Above the clouds I could see sacred Macupatari, Dalighuri and Annapurna. Higher than I could ever climb. But I could see.

I could see at dawn and the darkness, I could see high above me the rumoured home of goods. While I know little of the truth of such things, I can see the evidence their munificence, the trickling creeks and tumbling brooks, the falls, the canyons, the torrents, the rivers, bring water for the mother, down from the mountains across the plains and to the ocean bringing with them little bits of life from every farm and village, that they too, might be joined with the great ocean.

And now I sit reverend, by a river, in a jungle, a river silent, calm and swift, a river that joins the mountains with the ocean. And I am at one with the river. And so with all rivers.

From child to boy to man to master to servant to slave to quietly watching, do I now understand the journey?

Undated – approximately 2000 – probably Nepal