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Necessity of Wilderness

16 October 2008

### The Melody of the Wilderness

The identity of wilderness, signing or silent, is different for everyone who enters its realm. Sigurd Olson wrote his own account detailing his connection to nature while in the wilderness. His concept of a singing wilderness included finding solace in solitude and silence, while being able to connect with the past. "This was a time for silence, for being in pace with ancient rhythms and timelessness, the breathing of the lake, the slow growth of living things" (Olson 130). When Olson heard the wilderness sing, he had to be silent which allowed him to understand the past.

As I endured my stay in the Boundary Waters, immersed in nature, Olson's lyrics of the singing wilderness began strumming a melody in my ears. It was not his song that he described in his novel, but a song that was unique to me. I discovered nature's song on the water, at night, and in my assigned reflection time.

I first experienced the singing through solitude at night. We arrived at Sawbill Campsite, restless and eager to explore the area. It was getting late and dusk was beginning to settle and we were near the edge of the Sawbill Lake. We came upon an opening that looked like a small landing that had large, flat rocks and logs. Without direction, we all arranged ourselves on the rocks and immediately fell silent. One by one, we turned our headlamps off and the light that shone from the

stars against the vast, dark sky replaced them. As I gazed over the glassy lake and into the sky, I felt like no one was around me and I was one with the wilderness. For the first time in my life, I was not at the center of attention: nature was. I was just a minuscule detail in the vast wilderness. Time stopped. There were no sounds and no distractions.



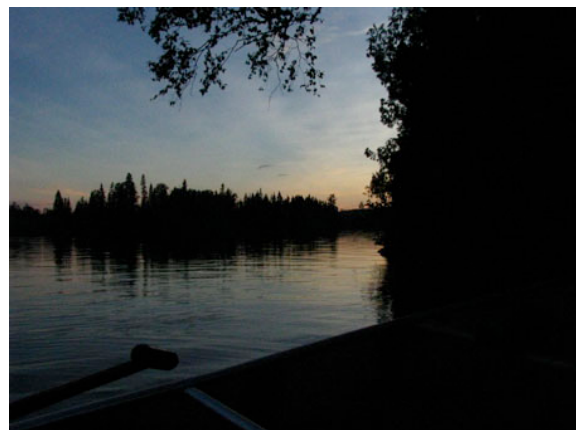
Picture by: Megan Larsen

This experience was odd for me because I am normally a high-strung, high-stressed individual. I was amazed that something so simple, like the wilderness, could succumb me into a calm, relaxed state so easily. The singing was not sound, however, it was silence.

I next heard the singing wilderness on the water. We had a difficult day trekking over long, rocky and muddy portages and paddling through various lakes and streams. It was a beautiful day; the sun was shining brightly and there was not a cloud in the sky. We decided to go swimming in the lake, but quickly became bored with that. We climbed into the canoes and

journeyed to an open area on Brule Lake. When we had paddled far enough away from our campsite, we tied our two canoes together and laid out on the lake.

Surrounding us as we sunbathed was the smooth, rhythmic waves gently rocking the canoes and the beautiful loons calling alongside us as



Picture by: Megan Larsen

we gently drifted. The calls were unique and they carried over the water through various pitches, yet they all seemed to fit perfectly in the song. The waves crashing alongside the canoe served as a lullaby, softly serenading me to sleep. I had heard the singing wilderness before, but this was the first time I actually listened to it.

The last time I heard the wilderness sing was the final day we were on Cherokee Lake. One of our assignments was to spend an hour completely alone and in reflection. I paddled about a half mile from our campsite to an island. I sat on the flat-faced rock watching the sun set beneath the

horizon. Although the scene was beautiful, I grew restless and bored. Something bigger, something obsolete came over me. I heard the wind before I felt it. The waves crashed onto the shore and splashed my bare toes. I smelled



Picture by: Shea Rasmussen

the different fragrances from the shrubs and trees that cloaked the island. I realized I had to be still and knew I had to seek human silence in solitude so that I could hear the music of the earth.

A person cannot define the singing wilderness. The songs echoing throughout the wilderness are unique for every individual. My melody was to the beat of silence in the night, the subtle noises on the water, and the solitude in my reflection time. To hear one's own song, one must venture to the unknown havens of nature to learn and respect his melody.