

## ~ Awakening in the Siskiyou Wilderness ~

*"To me, every hour of the day and night is an unspeakably perfect miracle"*

*-Walt Whitman*

The moon sits as a pale orange disc in a black silent sky. Mare Vaporum, Mare Insularum, Mare Fecunditatis, the moon's vast dark plains stand in bas relief to a mysterious lunar glow. Mare. Latin for the sea. A romantic and mistaken identity given to these shadowy expanses on the moon's surface. A drop of water there would be instantly vaporized on this cold and lifeless satellite of our warm, blue earth. And yet the moon's allure fully captures my attention as it did the ancient astronomers who were enraptured by its deep and sensual power. It carries a life of its own.

I wait a few minutes longer at the banks of the cove, draping my shoulders in a cloak against the chill of late Autumn. A sudden glacial breeze finds its way here from some Northern arctic ocean and I draw inward to feel the warmth my body has generated during the brisk walk down to the lake. It is here that Whitman and Hemingway speak to me, reminding me that despite my perceived imperfections something magical exists beyond comparisons, calculations and plans. Jim Harrison tells it this way: Whoever we are isn't for certain. ☐

In some inexplicable way this is comforting. There is something much larger than who we think we are. In the expansive night I hear the heart's language whose wild and unruly manner guides my ship in a most reliable and authentic way toward some alchemical land I've had glimpses of. It brings back images of the life-changing events that took place in the Siskiyou Mountains, the sanctuary of the Karuk people of Northern California. It was there that my own life and death danced together without a hint of contradiction.

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For five years the medicine man had been wheedling me to visit those sacred lands. In the spring of 1997 I was finally ready. The Karuk elder's body was compact and low to the ground, amazingly strong for his age. His broad attractive face showed not a sign of worry or concern, his eyes danced with a Coyote-like humor and a Red Hawk's vision.

He saw things beyond place and time, beyond concepts and ideas, into the heart and spirit of things. He summoned me to a quest, a 17 mile hike deep into the wilderness of the Klamath National forest with a group of folks who seemed to embody the same lostness that I had been feeling for quite some time.

Unexpectedly I would find something in the Siskiyou wilderness I didn't know I was looking for.

We met at the trailhead and after a day's hike to Spirit Lake we set up camp, talked for a while and turned in for a good night's rest. At dawn we crawled out of our tents to meet the sunrise and meticulously built a sweat lodge in which we gathered for several days of purification and prayer.

After the third day I had a compelling feeling to leave the group and set out on my own for the final leg of my quest, a journey in which I would spend five days alone in the wilderness. Although I came to this decision on my own, I was aware that there were other forces at work coaxing me make a 17 mile solo trek back to the trailhead through lands I had never seen before.

I felt a great deal lighter as I prepared for my solo expedition. Three days of sweat lodge ceremony had relieved me of many of the unnecessary burdens my mind had created. For the next few days the only burdens I'd carry would be a forty pound backpack and a map of the few trails that snaked through the Siskiyou wilderness. I had chosen a route that would take me through dense woods of ancient hemlock, pine, fir and cedar and then out onto an escarpment trail that traversed a great valley encircled by the Marble Mountains. I was told that in this place I would be surrounded by remarkable beauty.

On the day of my departure the Karuk medicine man silently placed a chunk of wild celery root in my palm. I held the root and examined its appearance: it's amber color, the projections that resembled gnarly old fingers. I took in its scent and felt a deep connection with the earth I stood on.

In the minutes before I embarked on the trail that would lead me away from Spirit Lake and the friendships I had made in the last few days, I felt a sudden surge of terror. The medicine man tightened his fist around my hand and I felt his intention behind the act of passing the medicine on to me. In his eyes I could see the confidence I thought I lacked. The root he gave me would be the talisman that would help me sit side-by-side my fear as it tracked me through the wilderness. As

the Karuk elder turned away to join the others, I took my first step into the deep forest that awaited my arrival.

***To be continued.....***

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This piece is dedicated to Bill Harvey whose highly acclaimed books have been an excellent resource for clarity and creativity. Go to [www.mindmagicprogram.com](http://www.mindmagicprogram.com)

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