

Saving Our
Children
from Nature-
Deficit
Disorder

Last
Child
in the
Woods

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Revised and Updated



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5. A Life of the Senses: Nature vs. the Know-It-All State of Mind

*I go to nature to be soothed and healed,
and to have my senses put in tune once more.*

—JOHN BURROUGHS

CHILDREN NEED NATURE for the healthy development of their senses, and, therefore, for learning and creativity. This need is revealed in two ways: by an examination of what happens to the senses of the young when they lose connection with nature, and by witnessing the sensory magic that occurs when young people—even those beyond childhood—are exposed to even the smallest direct experience of a natural setting.

The Boyz of the Woods

In just a few weeks, a group of boyz of the hood become the boyz of the woods. At the Crestridge Ecological Reserve, 2,600 acres of mountainous California between the cities of El Cajon and Alpine, a dozen members of the Urban Corps, ages eighteen to twenty-five—all but one of them male, all of them Hispanic—follow two middle-aged Anglo women—park docents—through sage and patches of wild berries.

As members of the city-sponsored Urban Corps, they attend a charter school that emphasizes hands-on conservation work. They've spent the past few weeks at the nature preserve clearing trails, pulling out non-native plants, learning the art of tracking from a legendary former Border Patrol officer, and experiencing a sometimes baffling explosion

of senses. The young people wear uniforms: light-green shirts, dark-green pants, military-style canvas belts. One of the docents wears a blue sunbonnet, the other a baggy T-shirt and day pack.

"Here we have the home of the dusky-footed wood rat," says Andrea Johnson, a docent who lives on a ridge overlooking this land.

She points at a mound of sticks tucked under poison oak. A wood rat's nest looks something like a beaver's lodge; it contains multiple chambers, including specialized indoor latrines and areas where leaves are stored to get rid of toxins before eating. The nests can be as tall as six feet. Wood rats tend to have houseguests, Johnson explains. "Kissing bugs! Oh my, yes," she says. Kissing bugs, a.k.a. the blood-sucking assassin bug.

"This is one reason you might not want a wood-rat nest near your house. Kissing bugs are attracted to carbon dioxide, which we all exhale. Consequently, the kissing bug likes to bite people around their mouths," Johnson continues, fanning herself in the morning heat. "The bite eats away the flesh; my husband has a *big scar* on his face."

One of the Urban Corpsmen shudders so hard that his pants, fashionably belted far to the south of his hips, try to head farther south.

Leaving the wood-rat's lair, the docents lead the Urban Corps members through clusters of California fuchsia and laurel sumac into cool woods where a spring seeps into a little creek. Carlos, a husky six-footer with earrings and shaved head, leaps nimbly from rock to rock, his eyes filled with wonder. He whispers exclamations in Spanish as he crouches over a two-inch-long tarantula hawk, a wasp with orange wings, dark-blue body, and a sting considered one of the most painful of any North American insect. This wasp is no Rotarian; it will attack and paralyze a tarantula five times its size, drag it underground, plant a single egg, and seal the chamber on its way out. Later, the egg hatches into a grub that eats the spider alive. Nature is beautiful, but not always pretty.

Several of the young men spent their early childhood in rural Central America or on Mexican farms. Carlos, who now works as a brake

technician, describes his grandmother's farm in Sinaloa, Mexico. "She had pigs, man. She had land. It was fine." Despite their current urban habitats, these young first- and second-generation immigrants experienced nature more directly when they were small children than have most North Americans. "In Mexico, people know how hard it is to own a piece of land up here, so they value it. They take care of it. People who live on this side of the border don't value land so much. Take it for granted. Too much cream on the taco, or something." But right now the boyz of the woods aren't so serious. They begin to tease a nineteen-year-old with a shy grin and a hickey the size of a tarantula hawk.

"He's been sleepin' with his window open again," someone says. "Blair Witch got him."

"Nah, man," says Carlos, laughing, "*Chupacabras* chewed him," referring to Latin America's half-bat, half-kangaroo, razor-clawed, goat-sucking mythological beast, most recently reported in Argentina. Or maybe it was just the kissing bug.

Over the weeks, Carlos has observed closely and sketches the plants and animals in notebooks. Along with the other students, he has watched a bobcat stalk game, heard the sudden percussive of disturbed rattlesnake dens, and felt a higher music. "When I come here, I can *exhale*," says Carlos. "Here, you *hear* things; in the city, you can't hear anything because you can hear everything. In the city, everything is *obvious*. Here, you get closer and you see more."

Losing Our Senses

Not that long ago, the sound track of a young person's days and nights was composed largely of the notes of nature. Most people were raised on the land, worked the land, and were often buried on the same land. The relationship was direct.

Today, the life of the senses is, literally, electrified. One obvious contributor is electronics: television and computers. But simpler, early technologies played important roles. Air-conditioning, for example: The

U.S. Census Bureau reports that in 1910, only 12 percent of housing had air-conditioning. People threw open their sash windows and let in night air and the sound of wind in leaves. By the time the baby boomers came along, approximately half our homes were air-conditioned. By 1970, that figure was 72 percent, and by 2001, 78 percent.

In 1920, most farms were miles from a city of any size. Even by 1935, fewer than 12 percent of America's farms had electricity (compared to 85 percent of urban homes); not until the mid-1940s were even half of all U.S. farm homes electrified. In the 1920s, farmers gathered at feed stores or cotton gins to listen to the radio, or created their own wired networks by connecting several homes to a single radio. In 1949, only 36 percent of farms had telephone service.

Few of us are about to trade our air conditioners for fans. But one price of progress is seldom mentioned: a diminished life of the senses. Like the boyz of the hood, as human beings we need direct, natural experiences; we require fully activated senses in order to feel fully alive. Twenty-first-century Western culture accepts the view that because of omnipresent technology we are awash in data. But in this information age, vital information is missing. Nature is about smelling, hearing, tasting, seeing below the "transparent mucous-paper in which the world like a bon-bon is wrapped so carefully that we can never get at it," as D. H. Lawrence put it, in a relatively obscure but extraordinary description of his own awakening to nature's sensory gift. Lawrence described his awakening in Taos, New Mexico, as an antidote to the "know-it-all state of mind," that poor substitute for wisdom and wonder:

Superficially, the world has become small and known. Poor little globe of earth, the tourists trot round you as easily as they trot round the Bois or round Central Park. There is no mystery left, we've been there, we've seen it, we know all about it. We've done the globe and the globe is done.

This is quite true, superficially. On the superficies, horizontally,

A Life of the Senses

we've been everywhere and done everything, we know all about it. Yet the more we know, superficially, the less we penetrate, vertically. It's all very well skimming across the surface of the ocean and saying you know all about the sea. . . .

As a matter of fact, our great-grandfathers, who never went anywhere, in actuality had more experience of the world than we have, who have seen everything. When they listened to a lecture with lantern-slides, they really held their breath before the unknown, as they sat in the village school-room. We, bowling along in a rickshaw in Ceylon, say to ourselves: "It's very much what you'd expect." We really know it all.

We are mistaken. The know-it-all state of mind is just the result of being outside the mucous-paper wrapping of civilization. Underneath is everything we don't know and are afraid of knowing.

Some of us adults recognize the know-it-all state of mind in ourselves, sometimes at unlikely moments.

Todd Merriman, a newspaper editor and father, remembers an illuminating hike with his young son. "We were walking across a field in the mountains," he says. "I looked down and saw mountain lion tracks. They were fresh. We immediately headed back to the car, and then I saw another set of tracks. I knew they had not been there before. The lion had circled us." In that moment of dread and excitement, he became intensely aware of his surroundings. Later, he realized that he could not remember the last time he had used all of his senses so acutely. The near encounter jarred something loose.

How much of the richness of life have he and his son traded for their daily immersion in indirect, technological experience? Today, Merriman often thinks about that question—usually while he is sitting in front of a computer screen.

IT DOESN'T TAKE AN ENCOUNTER with a mountain lion for us to recognize that our sensory world has shrunk. The information age is, in

fact, a myth, despite songwriter Paul Simon's phrase, "These are the days of miracle and wonder. . . . Lasers in the jungle," and all that. Our indoor life feels downsized, as if it's lost a dimension or two. Yes, we're enamored of our gadgets—our cell phones connected to our digital cameras connected to our laptops connected to an e-mail-spewing satellite transponder hovering somewhere over Macon, Georgia. Of course, some of us (I include myself here) love the gizmology. But quality of life isn't measured only by what we gain, but also by what we trade for it.

Instead of spending less time at the office, we work on Internet Time. A billboard on the freeway near my home advertises an online banking service. It shows a chipper young woman in front of her computer saying, "I expect to pay bills at 3 A.M." Electronic immersion will continue to deepen. Researchers at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology's Media Laboratory are working to make computers invisible in the home. In New York, architects Gisue and Mojgan Hariri promote their idea of a dream Digital House, with walls of LCD screens.

As electronic technology surrounds us, we long for nature—even if the nature is synthetic. Several years ago, I met Tom Wrubel, founder of the Nature Company, the pioneering mall outlet for all things faux flora and fauna. In the beginning, the store, which became a nationwide chain, was aimed primarily at children. In 1973, Wrubel and his wife, Priscilla, noted a common thread in nature-oriented retailing: the emphasis was on *getting* to nature. "But once you got to the mountains or wherever, what do you do, except shoot or catch things," he said. "So we emphasized books and gadgets to use in nature."

The Wrubels caught and accelerated a wave—what the Nature Company's president, Roger Bergen, called "the shift from activity-orientation in the 1960s and '70s, to knowledge-orientation in the '80s." The Nature Company marketed nature as mood, at first to children primarily. "We go for strong vertical stone elements, giant archways. Gives you the feeling that you're entering Yosemite Canyon. At the entrances, we place stone creeks with running water—but these creeks are

modernistic, an architect's dream of creekness," Tom Wrubel explained. His version of nature was both antiseptic and whimsical. Visitors walked through the maze of products: dandelion blossoms preserved within crystalline domes; designer bird-feeders; inflatable snakes and dinosaurs; bags of Nature Company natural cedar tips from the mountains of New Mexico; "pine cones in brass cast from Actual Cones," according to the display sign. In the air: the sounds of wind and water, buzzing shrimp, snapping killer whales—courtesy of "The Nature Company Presents: Nature," available on audiotape and compact disk. "Mood tapes" were also available, including "Tranquility," a forty-seven-minute, musically scored video the catalog described as a "deeply calming, beautiful study in the shapes and colors of clouds, waves, unfolding blossoms and light."

Wrubel sincerely believed that his stores stimulated concern for the environment. Perhaps he was right.

Such design emphasis now permeates malls across the country. For example, Minnesota's Mall of America now has its own UnderWater World. John Beardsley, a curator who teaches at the Harvard Design School, describes this simulated natural attraction in *Earthworks and Beyond: Contemporary Art in the Landscape*: "You're in a gloomy boreal forest in the fall, descending a ramp past bubbling brooks and glass-fronted tanks stocked with freshwater fish native to the northern woodlands. At the bottom of the ramp, you step onto a moving walkway and are transported through a 300-foot-long transparent tunnel carved into a 1.2-million-gallon aquarium. All around you are the creatures of a succession of ecosystems: the Minnesota lakes, the Mississippi River, the Gulf of Mexico, and a coral reef."

There, according to the mall's promotional line, you'll "meet sharks, rays, and other exotic creatures face to face." This "piece of concocted nature," as Beardsley terms it, "is emblematic of a larger phenomenon." Beardsley calls it the growing "commodification of nature: the increasingly pervasive commercial trend that views and uses nature as a sales

gimmick or marketing strategy, often through the production of replicas or simulations.” This can be presented on a grand scale; more often, the commodification of nature occurs in smaller, subtler ways. As Beardsley points out, this phenomenon is new only in scale and to the degree that it permeates everyday life. “For at least five centuries—since the 15th-century Franciscan monk Fra Bernardino Caimi reproduced the shrines of the Holy Land at Sacro Monte in Varallo, Italy, for the benefit of pilgrims unable to travel to Jerusalem—replicas of sacred places, especially caves and holy mountains, have attracted the devout,” he writes. The 1915 Panama-Pacific International Exposition in San Francisco included a small railroad, according to Beardsley, that “featured fabricated elephants, a replica of Yellowstone National Park complete with working geysers, and a mock-up Hopi village.” But now, “almost everywhere we look, whether we see it or not, commodity culture is reconstructing nature. Synthetic rocks, video images of forests, Rainforest Cafés.”

Mall and retail design is one way to package nature for commercial purposes, but the next stage goes a step further by using nature itself as an advertising medium. Researchers at the State University of New York at Buffalo are experimenting with a genetic technology through which they can choose the colors that appear on butterfly wings. The announcement of this in 2002 led writer Matt Richtel to conjure a brave new advertising medium: “There are countless possibilities for moving ads out of the virtual world and into the real one. Sponsorship-wise, it’s time for nature to carry its weight.” Advertisers already stamp their messages into the wet sands of public beaches. Cash-strapped municipalities hope corporations agree to affix their company logo on parks in exchange for dollars to keep the public spaces maintained. “The sheer popularity” of simulating nature or using nature as ad space “demands that we acknowledge, even respect, their cultural importance,” suggests Richtel. Culturally important, yes. But the logical extension of synthetic nature is the irrelevance of “true” nature—the certainty that it’s not even worth looking at.

True, our experience of natural landscape “often occurs within an automobile looking out,” as Elaine Brooks said. But now even that visual connection is optional. A friend of mine was shopping for a new luxury car to celebrate her half-century of survival in the material world. She settled on a Mercedes SUV, with a Global Positioning System: just tap in your destination and the vehicle not only provides a map on the dashboard screen, but talks you there. But she knew where to draw the line. “The salesman’s jaw dropped when I said I didn’t want a backseat television monitor for my daughter,” she told me. “He almost refused to let me leave the dealership until he could understand why.” Rear-seat and in-dash “multimedia entertainment products,” as they are called, are quickly becoming the hottest add-on since rearview mirror fuzzy dice. The target market: parents who will pay a premium for a little backseat peace. Sales are brisk; the prices are falling. Some systems include wireless, infrared-connected headsets. The children can watch *Sesame Street* or play Grand Theft Auto on their PlayStation without bothering the driver.

Why do so many Americans say they want their children to watch less TV, yet continue to expand the opportunities for them to watch it? More important, why do so many people no longer consider the physical world worth watching? The highway’s edges may not be postcard perfect. But for a century, children’s early understanding of how cities and nature fit together was gained from the backseat: the empty farmhouse at the edge of the subdivision; the variety of architecture, here and there; the woods and fields and water beyond the seamy edges—all that was and is still available to the eye. This was the landscape that we watched as children. It was our drive-by movie.

Perhaps we’ll someday tell our grandchildren stories about our version of the nineteenth-century Conestoga wagon.

“You did *what?*” they’ll ask.

“Yes,” we’ll say, “it’s true. We actually *looked out the car window.*” In our useful boredom, we used our fingers to draw pictures on fogged glass as

we watched telephone poles tick by. We saw birds on the wires and combines in the fields. We were fascinated with roadkill, and we counted cows and horses and coyotes and shaving-cream signs. We stared with a kind of reverence at the horizon, as thunderheads and dancing rain moved with us. We held our little plastic cars against the glass and pretended that they, too, were racing toward some unknown destination. We considered the past and dreamed of the future, and watched it all go by in the blink of an eye.

Soap
May do
For lads with fuzz
But sir, you ain't
the kid you wuz
Burma-Shave.

Is roadside America really so boring today? In some stretches, yes, but all the others are instructive in their beauty, even in their ugliness. Hugh A. Mulligan, in an Associated Press story about rail travel, quoted novelist John Cheever's recollection of the "peaceable landscape" once seen by suburban rail commuters: "It seemed to me that fishermen and lone bathers and grade-crossing watchmen and sandlot ballplayers and owners of small sailing craft and old men playing pinochle in firehouses were the people who stitched up the big holes in the world made by people like me." Such images still exist, even in this malled America. There is a real world, beyond the glass, for children who look, for those whose parents encourage them to truly see.

The Rise of Cultural Autism

In the most nature-deprived corners of our world we can see the rise of what might be called cultural autism. The symptoms? Tunneled senses, and feelings of isolation and containment. Experience, including physical risk, is narrowing to about the size of a cathode ray tube, or

flat panel if you prefer. Atrophy of the senses was occurring long before we came to be bombarded with the latest generation of computers, high-definition TV, and wireless phones. Urban children, and many suburban children, have long been isolated from the natural world because of a lack of neighborhood parks, or lack of opportunity—lack of time and money for parents who might otherwise take them out of the city. But the new technology accelerates the phenomenon. “What I see in America today is an almost religious zeal for the technological approach to every facet of life,” says Daniel Yankelovich, the veteran public opinion analyst. This faith, he says, transcends mere love for new machines. “It’s a value system, a way of thinking, and it can become delusional.”

The late Edward Reed, an associate professor of psychology at Franklin and Marshall College, was one of the most articulate critics of the myth of the information age. In *The Necessity of Experience* he wrote, “There is something wrong with a society that spends so much money, as well as countless hours of human effort—to make the least dregs of processed information available to everyone everywhere and yet does little or nothing to help us explore the world for ourselves.” None of our major institutions or our popular culture pay much notice to what Reed called “primary experience”—that which we can see, feel, taste, hear, or smell for ourselves. According to Reed, we are beginning “to lose the ability to experience our world directly. What we have come to mean by the term experience is impoverished; what we have of experience in daily life is impoverished as well.” René Descartes argued that physical reality is so ephemeral that humans can only experience their personal, internal interpretation of sensory input. Descartes’ view “has become a major cultural force in our world,” wrote Reed, one of a number of psychologists and philosophers who pointed to the post-modern acceleration of indirect experience. They proposed an alternative view—ecological psychology (or ecopsychology)—steeped in the ideas of John Dewey, America’s most influential educator. Dewey

warned a century ago that worship of secondary experience in childhood came with the risk of depersonalizing human life.

North Carolina State University professor Robin Moore directs a research and design program that promotes the natural environment in the daily lives of children. He takes Reed and Dewey to heart in his contemporary examination of postmodern childhood play. Primary experience of nature is being replaced, he writes, "by the secondary, vicarious, often distorted, dual sensory (vision and sound only), one-way experience of television and other electronic media." According to Moore:

Children live through their senses. Sensory experiences link the child's exterior world with their interior, hidden, affective world. Since the natural environment is the principal source of sensory stimulation, freedom to explore and play with the outdoor environment through the senses in their own space and time is essential for healthy development of an interior life. . . . This type of self-activated, autonomous interaction is what we call free play. Individual children test themselves by interacting with their environment, activating their potential and reconstructing human culture. The content of the environment is a critical factor in this process. A rich, open environment will continuously present alternative choices for creative engagement. A rigid, bland environment will limit healthy growth and development of the individual or the group.

Little is known about the impact of new technologies on children's emotional health, but we do know something about the implications for adults. In 1998, a controversial Carnegie Mellon University study found that people who spend even a few hours on the Internet each week suffer higher levels of depression and loneliness than people who use the Net infrequently. Enterprising psychologists and psychiatrists now treat Internet Addiction, or IA as they call it.

As we grow more separate from nature, we continue to separate from one another physically. The effects are more than skin deep, says Nancy

Dess, senior scientist with the American Psychological Association. “None of the new communication technologies involve human touch; they all tend to place us one step removed from direct experience. Add this to control-oriented changes in the workplace and schools, where people are often forbidden, or at least discouraged, from any kind of physical contact, and we’ve got a problem,” she says. Without touch, infant primates die; adult primates with touch deficits become more aggressive. Primate studies also show that physical touch is essential to the peace-making process. “Perversely, many of us can go through an average day and not have more than a handshake,” she adds. Diminishing touch is only one by-product of the culture of technical control, but Dess believes it contributes to violence in an ever more tightly wired society.

Frank Wilson, professor of neurology at the Stanford University School of Medicine, is an expert on the co-evolution of the hominid hand and brain. In *The Hand*, he contends that one could not have evolved to its current sophistication without the other. He says, “We’ve been sold a bill of goods—especially parents—about how valuable computer-based experience is. We are creatures identified by what we do with our hands.” Much of our learning comes from doing, from making, from feeling with our hands; and though many would like to believe otherwise, the world is not entirely available from a keyboard. As Wilson sees it, we’re cutting off our hands to spite our brains. Instructors in medical schools find it increasingly difficult to teach how the heart works as a pump, he says, “because these students have so little real-world experience; they’ve never siphoned anything, never fixed a car, never worked on a fuel pump, may not even have hooked up a garden hose. For a whole generation of kids, direct experiences in the backyard, in the tool shed, in the fields and woods, has been replaced by indirect learning, through machines. These young people are smart, they grew up with computers, they were supposed to be superior—but now we know that something’s missing.”

The Infinite Reservoir

Not surprisingly, as the young grow up in a world of narrow yet overwhelming sensory input, many of them develop a wired, know-it-all state of mind. That which cannot be Googled does not count. Yet a fuller, grander, more mysterious world, one worthy of a child's awe, is available to children and the rest of us. Bill McKibben, in *The Age of Missing Information*, argues that "the definition of television's global village is just the contrary—it's a place where there's as little variety as possible, where as much information as possible is wiped away to make 'communications' easier." He describes his personal experience with a nearby mountain: "The mountain says you live in a particular place. Though it's a small area, just a square mile or two, it took me many trips to even start to learn its secrets. Here there are blueberries, and here there are bigger blueberries . . . You pass a hundred different plants along the trail—I know maybe twenty of them. One could spend a lifetime learning a small range of mountains, and once upon a time people did."

Any natural place contains an infinite reservoir of information, and therefore the potential for inexhaustible new discoveries. As naturalist Robert Michael Pyle says, "Place is what takes me out of myself, out of the limited scope of human activity, but this is not misanthropic. A sense of place is a way of embracing humanity among all of its neighbors. It is an entry into the larger world."

During my visits with middle school, high school, and college students, a discussion of the senses would inevitably come about when we talked about nature. Sometimes I would ask directly, other times the students would raise the subject in the classroom or later, through essays. Their verbal answers were often hesitant, searching. This was apparently not a subject that many, if any, had confronted before. For some young people, nature is so abstract—the ozone layer, a faraway rain forest—that it exists beyond the senses. For others, nature is simple

background, a disposable consumer item. One young man in a Potomac, Maryland, classroom described his relationship with nature as shaky, at best. "Like most I exploit what it gives and I do with it what I please," he said. He thought of nature "as a means to an end or a tool; something made to be used and admired, not something to live. Nature to me is like my house or even like my cluttered room. It has things in it which can be played with. I say play away, do what you want with it, it's your house." He made no mention of the senses, saw or understood no complexity. I admired his honesty.

Yet other young people, when prompted, did describe how experiences in nature excited their senses. For example, one boy recalled his sensory experience when camping, "the red and orange flames dancing in the darkness, the smoky fumes rising up, burning my eyes and nostrils. . . ."

The experience of irrepressible Jared Grano, a ninth-grader whose father is a middle-school principal, sends a positive message to parents who worry that they might be alienating their kids from nature by taking them on the sometimes-dreaded family vacation. He complained that, although vacations are supposed to be for getting away from it all, "Unfortunately, I had to take them all with me! My parents, younger brother, and younger sister would all be traveling with me in an oven on wheels for over a week. The Grand Canyon? I was in no hurry to see the canyon. I figured it would be there for me later." When the family arrived, Jared gazed at "the massive temples of the canyon." His first thought was, "It looks like a painting." He was impressed by the beauty and majesty of the surroundings. "But after seeing the canyon from several different vantage points, I was ready to leave. Although the canyon was magnificent, I felt that I was not part of it—and without being part of it, it seemed little more than a giant hole in the ground." But the vacation was young, and the know-it-all state of mind penetrable. After the Grand Canyon, his family drove to smaller Walnut Canyon

National Monument, near Flagstaff, Arizona. Jared assumed that Walnut Canyon would be similar to the Grand Canyon, “interesting to look at, but nothing to hold my attention.”

Nine hundred years ago, the Sinagua people built their homes under cliff overhangs. Twenty miles long, four hundred feet deep and a quarter mile wide, the canyon is populated with soaring turkey vultures, as well as elk and javelina. Life zones overlap, mixing species that usually live apart; cacti grow beside mountain firs. Jared described details of the path they walked, how the bushes were low and straggly and looked as though they had been there for many years, and the shape of the tall green pines across the gap. “As we followed the path down into the canyon, the skies grew suddenly dark. It began raining and the rain quickly turned to sleet,” Jared wrote. “We found shelter in one of the ancient Indian caves. Lightning lit up the canyon and the sound of thunder reverberated in the cave. As we stood waiting for the storm to end, my family and I talked about the Indians who once lived here. We discussed how they cooked in the caves, slept in the caves, and found shelter in the caves—just as we were doing.” He looked out across the canyon through the haze of rain. “I finally felt that I was a part of nature.” The context of his life shifted. He was immersed in living history, witnessing natural events beyond his control, keenly aware of it all. He was *alive*.

Surely such moments are more than pleasant memories. The young don’t demand dramatic adventures or vacations in Africa. They need only a taste, a sight, a sound, a touch—or, as in Jared’s case, a lightning strike—to reconnect with that receding world of the senses.

The know-it-all state of mind is, in fact, quite vulnerable. In a flash, it burns, and something essential emerges from its ashes.