

Transcendent Edge.

The man sometimes heard squirrels, birds, and other animals in his surroundings calling out alarms, so it was usually no big deal hearing them. The Blue Jays would give voice and warning when a feral cat was in the area, and other Jays would join in, creating a cacophony that was usually enough to drive away the cat. Pine squirrels make an irritating, high-pitched alert that could go on for many minutes, and usually, the man would not find any reason for their alerts. Grey squirrels often tap one of their front paws rapidly on a tree trunk or branch, and apparently, this alert is to let their adversary know that the squirrel sees them and not to bother stalking them any longer. Chipmunks make a single, high-pitched squeak and dart for cover, and if you happen to be near their nest, you can hear their high-pitched yet low-volume squeaking and conversing as they remain hidden. And often, of course, their alarms this time were just because he walked near what they presumed was their territory.

The man was learning to sit, listen, and not interfere with the wildlife around him. Of course, by merely living in nature, he was, by default, constantly interfering. His home in the woods was built by clearing hundreds of trees. Concrete foundations were poured, and the cabin was built. A septic tank was installed, and electricity and water were run to his property and home. He made a vegetable garden and put a fence around it to protect the vegetables for his personal use. However, a squirrel got through the fence and began burrowing and eating his potatoes. The man yelled and stomped his feet to scare it off three times, and the fourth time the ground squirrel went into the man's garden and began eating his potatoes; he shot and killed it with his air rifle. He didn't want to kill any squirrels, but the vegetables in his garden were for himself. He warned the other squirrels loudly on many occasions that their fate would be the same if they ate the produce in his garden again. Two other squirrels failed to heed his warnings and threats,

and after being chased off and verbally warned several more times, they were shot and killed. Surprisingly, no more squirrels had since bothered his garden. Many squirrels and birds still drank from the water bowl he cleaned and filled daily, located on a railing overlooking his garden. Yet, not one of the squirrels or chipmunks bothered his vegetables again.

Some of his plants required more water than the drip system provided, but he couldn't increase the time the drip system ran as that would be too much water for the other plants. He filled two five-gallon buckets with water and hand-watered any plants requiring extra water every other day. One afternoon weeks later, he heard a Pine squirrel's alarm, but looking around, he saw nothing. The following day, when he went to hand-water his plants, he found a Pine squirrel drowned in one of his five-gallon buckets because the sides of the bucket were too slick for it to climb out of the deep water.

The man was saddened to find the drowned squirrel and asked the dead squirrel if the alarm he heard was from it. He again asked the dead squirrel why it didn't simply use the water bowl it had been using all spring and summer. The man blamed himself because he had forgotten to put a stick in the bucket for critters to climb out of if they fell in. Of course, none of his wonderings could be answered; nevertheless, he put a branch in each bucket, ending the drowning drama.

But the drowning of the little, beautiful Pine squirrel bothered the man and caused him to think about many things he had seen but not yet questioned.

For instance, a person on a passenger ferry sees hundreds of seagulls following the ferry throughout the night and is amazed. In contrast, another sees the same hundreds of seagulls and reflects on the thousands of seagulls that have died.

Or a person watches a mountain lion kill a raccoon in an epic, 35-minute fight and, when relating the experience, is asked, “Why didn’t you shoot the mountain lion?” And the person replies, “I never even thought of doing that.”

Or a person is aware that life is finite and controls their life accordingly, yet, as they advance into old age, they begin to accept what was unacceptable to them earlier.

Or a person willingly loves another person or an animal, regardless of the emotional cost. Yet, as they age, they stop wanting to love new people and things because the emotional cost becomes too high.

Or a person notes how the raccoon fought so hard for so long because it wanted to live longer, but the lion fought longer and harder so it could live longer.

Or a person sees the emotionless faces of prey as they meet their final fate by a predator.

Whether that’s a fawn or its mother, after an initial alarm call, which is usually a vain attempt to escape, the animal seems to surrender to death, seemingly without emotion.

The man was becoming fixated on something that seemed to lie outside his comprehension.

Understanding what he was trying to understand would require that he somehow transcend his daily mundane thoughts and what he thought he knew. He didn’t know how he knew this, yet he understood days earlier that none of his wonderings could be answered factually, but he also knew some wondering required an answer. He did research over several days and sought access to areas in his brain that usually sat beyond his ability to reach them consciously. Sometimes, when he meditated, these areas would provide answers to him without him asking.

The mundane, circular thought patterns he had been experiencing gave way to calm. And several days later, during his morning meditation, a word was revealed to him, which was

transcendent. That word felt and sounded lovely to him. Transcendent felt like it put his wonderings into a helium balloon, which immediately lifted them into an area of his mind where he could understand what was formerly not understandable.

There had been times in the man's life when he had experienced similar transformational thoughts. He would extrapolate a series of transformational ideas from that one transformational thought. A simple example, he thought, was about the emotion of hate. *I had experienced the feeling of hating people, politics, the military, and many other things my entire life until, one day, I questioned why I hated and where I had learned to hate. The questioning led me to ask more and more questions until I finally got to the core of my question: what is hate? The first answer was simply that I had learned hate from others who hated. I had felt their hate, and then I knew what hate felt like from them. Yes, I had also met many, and heard from many, people that hate was never the answer and that hate begets hate. While I listened to their words and could still remember, quite clearly, hearing them, the words didn't transform me until I asked and answered the question of what hate is myself. Then I learned that I did not hate and that what I thought was hate was me vicariously acting out feelings I had learned from others. I knew that hate was, for me, a very ignorant emotion. I applied intelligence to the unrefined emotion called hate, and seemingly immediately, my hate was replaced by many new and positive ways of dealing with what was once hate. I finally learned this despite having heard that hate was unnecessary many times.*

He smiled ruefully yet with some humor as he realized that a big reason he had remained ordinary is that he, like most everyone, is bombarded with disparate information daily. An escape from that daily bombardment is seemingly impossible. He had tried to escape the barrage, but typically, he found that leaving one barrage only exposed him to another form of

barrage. The information overload caused by being so heavily bombarded daily left him little time for introspection.

This transformational thought differed from the others because there was no instant recognition of how this new information could be applied to other areas of his understanding. The man wanted to live in the forest he lived in without interfering with nature, but his mere presence seemed to create interference. Suddenly, he stopped that line of thought, and he smiled.

He thought *I now accept that I am a part of nature. And since I am a part of nature, I belong here as much as anything else belongs here.* That transcendent thought cracked the shell that had held him confined within a learned thought pattern that said he was not a part of nature. The thought pattern says nature is out there, and when doors and windows are shut, nature is shut out, and nature is kept at bay.

That one thought had unconsciously, once again, extrapolated itself into a life of him believing he was different from nature. He thought nature was outside and that he could build a house with doors and windows to be protected from nature. Yet here he was, finally accepting that he, too, was a part of nature and that he built his house the way he did to protect himself only from the elements of nature he needed protection from. He had protected himself from disease by installing a modern septic system and a clean water supply. He then protected himself from the elements by installing double pane windows, doors, and a good, wood-burning stove. He did not want to rely entirely on one heat source, so he installed a propane stove in his bedroom and electric heaters in three rooms. He could not rely on the electric grid, due mainly to the mountains of snow every winter, so he purchased a gasoline-powered backup generator.

As he kept thinking, he reflected on a time he was hiking in a remote area deemed a Wilderness Area. The recognition as a Wilderness Area affords that area many benefits to thwart man's insatiable need to protect himself from nature. As he stood in a small canyon, he heard birds and squirrels, and as he looked, he became acutely aware that nothing living there needed him or anyone else. Every living thing he saw seemed to be doing just fine without his, or human, intervention. What these animals and this environment needed was for humans to leave everything here alone.

He smiled as he recounted that hike because that day initially added to him feeling separated from nature, and the experience added to his misconception that there was nature and, separated from nature, was him and his cabin in the woods. *Yes, the man thought, humans have gotten better at coexisting with the wildlife we encounter and the remote areas we want to inhabit. For the most part, we are educated not to pollute and have learned enough so we mitigate the impact when we accidentally or inadvertently do. We'll never be perfect, but hopefully, we'll keep improving.*

The man was no fool, and he had lived many decades. He was born when the earth's population was under two billion people, and now the earth's population is over eight billion. He knew why areas had been designated Wilderness Areas and how humans had destroyed many once beautiful and pristine regions of the earth. He also knew many people had reversed, and were still trying to reverse, the effects of the decisions that ignorant people had made before them. But corporate money can shout louder than those talking about doing the next right thing. Once corporate money is infused into a project, it's nearly impossible to undo the effects that money and other subsequent adverse decisions can cause. From the mercury used a century ago to mine gold that is still polluting rivers and bays to this day to watering lawns with rapidly dwindling

supplies of drinking water to not knowing yet how to dispose of nuclear waste safely, Corporations keep moving large money-making projects forward without regard for the effects on nature.

He thought: *Humans often see the same things differently, and how they see things largely depends on who taught them what they now know. Yet it also depends on them individually and their ability to question their motivation for their actions.* The man wondered, *Do people ask the two questions everyone should ask over the course of their lives: Who am I now? and Why am I here now?*

The man sat back and said out loud, perhaps to the birds and squirrels that rarely ran or flew away from him, *Perhaps this is the Transcendent Edge, where I once again surpass being ordinary and become exceptional to myself. So much of what I have learned is indeed ordinary, and so much of ordinary is only partly true. Being ordinary isn't very exciting either,* he thought. *But going beyond and above being ordinary is quite exciting.*

A Blue Jay caught his eye, flying to the water bowl, and he noticed as it landed, the bird stumbled slightly. Looking more closely, he noticed it was the one with only one foot. This Blue Jay had hatched the past spring, and one day, the man saw its foot hanging, broken, deformed, and useless. Several weeks later, the foot was hanging by what looked like a thread, and then, several days later, the foot was gone. The Blue Jay used the stump that remained for balance, and while the Blue Jay was indeed handicapped, it did very well with only one foot.

The man thought, *How did the Blue Jay's foot get so damaged? Did it get caught in a crack on my deck, so it had to pull it out?* Then he thought, *Wondering cannot provide a factual answer.*

He then laughed aloud.

The End.

Written by Peter Skeels © August 30th, 2022