

IN THE IMAGE #187

Some years ago, I planned a fall hike with a few friends. Our destination was Grey Owl's cabin, on Kingsmere Lake. For the purposes of this story, I'll call my friends "Dale" and "Bruno."

We weren't far down the trail before we experienced a sense of holiness, of sacredness in the land. That sensation came from all of our senses working together to remind us that this place and this time and this little troika were unique. When I look at the pictures from that hike, the colours offer that reminder again, the shades of brilliant Thanksgiving hues.

The senses were all engaged, coming upon us as glorious shades of yellows and oranges, sounds of waves lapping at the shore line, smells of damp leaves and wild cranberries, the taste of hot mulligan stew in the crisp, gathering darkness of fall. It was everything you could want.

There was one small complicating factor, an aspect to this hike that left me a little puzzled. There was a sense that I still had some things to learn before I could fully be able to appreciate all of God's goodness. You see, my partners both had much more experience with this type of adventure, Bruno in exotic locations all over the globe, while Dale has explored much of the wilds of northern Saskatchewan. As much as I was able, I remained silent, almost as if at their feet, as they shared of their experiences. It seemed to me that most of those treks had led to my friends amassing a staggering body of knowledge about textiles.

In the days that we spent together, I learned much about Gortex, and vinyl polyurethane propylene, or something like that, and wicking qualities, what product was new, what was old. I learned about the latest technology in shoes, socks, in fact every piece of clothing was held up and discussed except, thankfully, undershorts. Jackets, tents, sleeping bags, sleeping mats, back packs, , I learned about a whole host of outdoor materials that I wasn't aware existed.

Somewhere there must be a whole host of nylon and acrylic worms from whose abdomens spin all manner of amazing products. There are also, so I was informed, very discerning places where one can avail themselves of these products, places that mere mortals cannot fully understand or appreciate. At least, that's the inference I picked up. A shopping experience could be encountered in Calgary, I

believe, that was spoken of as a “Mecca” experience, or perhaps it was “MEC,” that required annual trips to simply keep abreast of the latest and the strongest and the lightest and the best.

On several occasions, I screwed up my courage to join the conversation. As the topic of boots was dissected, the wonder of Gortex light hunting boots, and another kind of boot whose details I don’t recall but they had been to the top of two of the three highest mountains in India, I could hold back no longer. I shoved my own footwear into the circle and offered, “\$49.95, work boot from Peavey Mart!”

There was a brief moment of silence, then the question, “And what would be the waterproof quality of those.....boots?” I wasn’t sure but “Holly found a can of something in the basement that smelled like hairspray that I sprayed all over them, so I’m sure they’re good, and my feet are still dry!” Eyebrows raised slightly, probably because no rainfall had yet happened. The conversation was shifted away.

Another pause on the trail, another conversation, this time the topic was upper body wear, again very personal sharing. Again I felt the need to join in, to add the value of my own body of experience. I indicated my current torso covering and announced grandly, “Old blue work shirt!” This seemed like a perfect way to describe this particular garment. “Old” because it was old and suffused with welding burn holes for enhanced cooling, and “Blue” to distinguish it from the otherwise identical brown shirt that hung beside it in the closet. I had no sooner offered this wonderfully useful description when a head snapped around and I heard, “20% cotton, 80% polyester.” I sensed that this was less than acceptable, that wicking qualities were compromised with numbers like that.

I was beaten. These people played the game at a level of sophistication that was inaccessible to me, spoke a language that needed interpretation, and cared passionately about matters that I didn’t know existed.

Fortunately, the passion extended to many areas that we could share, and we celebrated together and breathed deeply in our thanksgiving for this world in which we found ourselves.

I am blessed to be surrounded by passionate folks. When our passions converge, we rejoice together. When passions diverge, hopefully I can remain quiet and learn.

It doesn’t always happen.