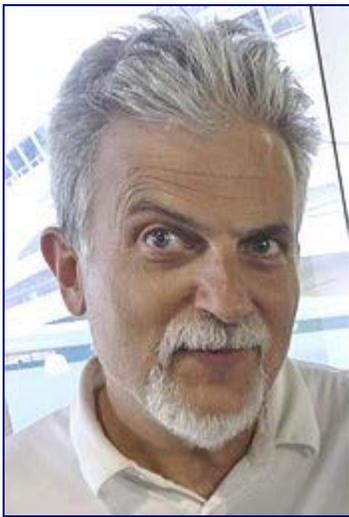


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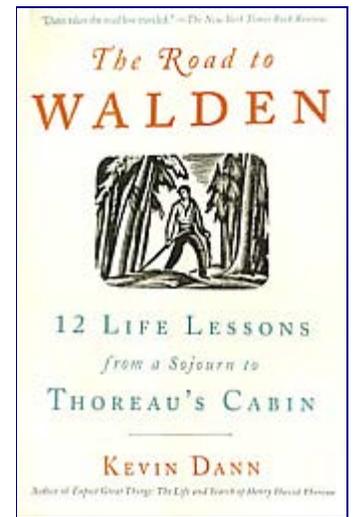
A READER'S JOURNAL

The Road to Walden
12 Life Lessons from a Sojourn to Thoreau's
Cabin
by
Kevin T. Dann

ARJ2 Chapter: Reading for Enjoyment
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A Book Review by Bobby Matherne ©2017

The author invites you to walk the road from New York City to Walden and face twelve life lessons

along the way. Are you ready?



Mark Twain published his serial novel about Joan of Arc anonymously because he wanted "to free his readers from hearing it in his renown comic satirical voice." (Page 10) I imagine it was partly because Twain's chosen pseudonym meant "We drink tonight!" and was greeted with a collective cheer by the thirsty crew of the steamboat when depth marker shouted, "Mark Twain!" We were all told that "mark twain" meant two fathoms of water below the steamboat's keel. But as children we weren't told the impact on the crew of the announcement of "Mark Twain!" You see, the twelve feet of water was deep enough for the boat to dock so the crew could go ashore and drink liquor!

Get ready for the heady brew which Kevin Dann offers us to quaff at twelve different depths along this journey with him. Drink up, as Sam Clemens did at thirteen when he found the story of Joan of Arc. Drink up, as Joan herself did at thirteen when the Archangel Michael talked to her in her father's garden. Drink up, as Thoreau did at twenty when Ralph Waldo Emerson spoke these fateful words to him, "Do you keep a journal?"

[page 11] "I was born to do this." Thoreau echoed Joan's commitment in his Journal declaration that "I have never got over my surprise that I should have been born into the most estimable place in the world; and in the nick of time, too." Can you imagine how fully the world would be transformed if this confidence in one's own destiny were a universal birthright, a pedestal for personal action in the world?

Kevin recalls a teenage night when he slipped out on his bike for a drunken revelry with his friend Pete, who later stuffed him into a barrel in an auto shop to keep Kevin from being discovered by the cops looking to break up a drinking party. Kevin kept popping up from the barrel yelling, "I'm going to save the world!" At eighteen I recall sharing with a college buddy that I was going to be great. He explained to me as a lawyer-to-be it was not possible to know such a thing ahead of time. Our destiny has a way of seeping out of us at odd moments, and when we find our story, Kevin suggests, stick to it. Our Angel knows our destiny, but does not shout it at us, but rather whispers it by day in our ear and fills our being with it as we sleep each night.

[page 21] . . . the Joan story from some nineteenth century primer, tumbling like a

tumbleweed across Mark Twain's path; Henry's chance meeting with Emerson on Main Street; these things are mercurial, easily overlooked, sleepwalked through. Don't sleep through what the angels have brought you. AWAKE.

#1 AWAKE! And know that you have slept with Angels.

Chapter 2: "When a Feller Needs a Friend": SPEAK!

His next deep drink was SPEAK! It found Kevin in New Rochelle where the welcoming sign shows a young fellow with three adorable mutts and reads: "The Place to Come When a Feller Needs a Friend". All I knew about the city was from watching Rob and Laura Petrie live there during the Dick van Dyke show. The way Kevin described the Feller sounds a lot like me as a kid growing up in Westwego, which was a suburb to New Orleans as New Rochelle was to New York.

[page 24] The Feller walks out of bounds by nature; no ruffled collars or starched shirts for this boy! He plays marbles for keeps, and gets a black eye now and then. He might smoke a butt behind the woodshed, and hates practicing on the parlor piano.

I walked into our local woods, cutting a water vine to drink the liquid which flowed from it; played marbles for keeps on the elementary playground at recess; smoked the very first filter-tip cigarettes when they appeared; but we never owned a luxury like a piano for me to hate practicing on. I flew kites, but I made them from split weather boards, tissue paper, flour and water paste, torn rags for tails, and No. 50 sewing thread to assemble and fly them with. I was a Feller in a very rough town and survived.

Thoreau was a walker, an extra-vagant one as he called himself. I never had any money to be extravagant, but like Henry I walked around and through my local town, becoming a newspaper boy on my bicycle from ages 12 to 15, which gave me access to front and back yards to most of the houses and yards in town, similar to the way Henry had access to most properties in Concord by virtue of being a surveyor. No one denied him access, figuring he was surveying; he spent so much time walking along the new-fangled railway that many thought he worked for the railway. He spent more time than some farmers did on their property and often reported problems to the owners he had observed. In many ways, the title was theirs, but he owned the land more than them in a very real way.

[page 30] Henry made it plain as day what sort of walker he was — a walker *out of bounds*, including the biggest boundary of all, that which we moderns call "nature," as we tightly circumscribe the cosmos into the tiger cage called the "physical world." "Walking" and *Walden*, and all of Henry's speaking, were uttered to *enlarge* that cage, to *bust it wide open* . . .

Joseph Campbell was from New Rochelle; married to a dancer, he loved to watch dance, to talk about dance, but not to dance. Dancing was outside his experience as a way of being, just as mythology was outside his way of being, but he could talk mythology till the cows came home and could tell you why they came home if you asked, no doubt. His PBS series on mythology made him a household name, but was he spiritual or did he just talk a good game?

[page 34] For, despite Bill Moyers's opening assertion that "Joseph Campbell was one of the most spiritual men I have ever met," the Feller from New Rochelle was a silver-tongued ideologist, a peddler of the most easily accepted of modern lies — that mythology is just a story, that the gods are human inventions, rather than the reverse.

Rightly understood, the reverse is true: Man is God's invention. Wrongly understood, Campbell proclaimed that myths were only stories told by humans in hundred of cultures, each myth based on the same story told over and again till they all seemed to be different stories.

[page 38] Would that Bill Moyers had devoted one episode of *The Power of Myth* to

going out and interviewing any one of the peoples whose myths Campbell so blithely threw into his big iron monomyth melting pot. Each and every tribe and tradition past and present would have taken the greatest offense, to be told that their revered portraits of the world beyond the physical were just so many pretty pictures, whose details could be substituted from one place and time to another.

Campbell is best known for recommending that people *follow their bliss*. Kevin seems to have pinpointed the origin of the concept and phrase appearing in Campbell's mind. Campbell told the story of a family in Bronxville, next to New Rochelle, of a son refusing to drink his tomato juice.

[page 42] The mother intervenes, and finally the father explodes: "He can't go through life doing what he wants to do. If he does only what he wants to do, he'll be dead. Look at me, I've never done a thing I wanted to in all my life."

My first thought was of my own father who always did what he wanted in life and taught us by example to do the same. If he couldn't afford a trailer to haul things with, he found an old rear axle of a car, had a hitch welded onto a pole and build a wood compartment atop the axle. Campbell's first thought was of Babbitt, Sinclair Lewis's epitome of the complacent middle-class businessman, who sacrificed his personal wishes to make money and never allowed himself to "follow his bliss".

Henry as a young man looked at the stereotyped ways that people of the area "followed their bliss" and decided to march to a *different drummer*, namely, his own rhythm of life.

[page 44] As a young "Feller" living across the street from Concord's principal Freemason Lodge, Henry had peeked in on those mock mysteries and found them wanting; instead of trying to bind the gods to appear through oaths and empty theater, he built his own temple out in the Walden woods, confident that the gods would visit him there. He was not disappointed. They are still there, waiting for us.

Campbell followed a different drummer's rhythm, too, but focused only the score of the rhythm written on paper and spoken aloud. If there were secrets to be revealed by actually dancing to the rhythms Joe studied, he missed them completely, all the while becoming adept in describing them to others.

[page 47] For Campbell, it is all about "materials" and "analogies," *not* spiritual realities.

"Every metaphor was once a living reality," which Henry's mentor Emerson once said to explain how our everyday words once contained a vibrant spirit that has long since been quashed into dead symbols on a page. Henry went walking into and through the living realities of his beloved Concord all his life and avoided symbols wherever possible. Henry never called this plant a weed or that one a flower, it would be a *Thaspium aureum*, *Oldenlandia cærulea*, a *Polygonum amphibium*, or some other specific real plant he had observed on his walks. He knew the common names, but by including the Latin names, made it possible for interlopers into his [Journals](#) a hundred and fifty years hence, like me, to locate and view the plants and find them on my own daily walks.

Not so Joe Campbell: he would take the most precious living reality, like a beautiful green fluttering Luna Moth, and pin it upon the page, to be observed as a material, a dead substance. To Joe, Christianity was simply another species of moth to be studied.

[page 48] The Virgin birth is a *symbol* to Joseph Campbell; the Crucifixion is a *symbol*; the Last Supper, Night in Gethsemane, Ascension, Pentecost, all the healing miracles are mere *symbols*. This is Joseph Campbell's great and unforgivable heresy. Christianity — and every step of Christ's life — is a *mystical fact*, with cosmic consequences for all eternity. There is nothing in the least "symbolic" about a single one of those steps!

If you came to this book to read about how great Joseph Campbell's work was, you will be shocked and disappointed. Yes, he was a son of New Rochelle, but Joe was light on his tongue not on his feet. Another son of New Rochelle, albeit fictional, Rob Petrie, was played by Dick van Dyke, who was literally light on his feet and put his whole body into his comedy routines.

[page 50] The "washing of the feet" is no universal mythic "trope," but a universal Christ-imparted supersensible physiological *reality* whose effects can easily be seen in such walking saints as Christ, Francis, Sister Elizabeth Ann Seton (this first American-born saint was from New Rochelle!), and Henry Thoreau. Their feet, which carry them and us toward the future, are literally *holy*.

Why do so many lectures and various talking-psychotherapy appointments last for an hour? It has to do with the rotation period of our throat chakra which completes its circle in one hour's time.

[page 50] The throat chakra is unsurprisingly the lotus flower of the word, and the Word. Hovering in the subtle body in the region of the larynx, it has petals that rotate once per hour. While Emerson and other admired antebellum orators often lectured for two hours or more, the Mars-blessed Henry instinctively kept his addresses to under an hour — the period of the throat chakra's rotation.

Find yourself a *different drumbeat*, Thoreau famously said, and no matter how measured, how far away; follow it, adopt it as your own drumbeat. Avoid those who upon hearing any new idea automatically counter with, "I know that!" Taking no time to mine and absorb any new idea, they live in a vacuous world, feigning a knowledge and enjoyment they severely lack.

[page 51] "Read not the Times," said Henry. "Read the Eternities." Stand apart from the mob. Be wary of anything — books, films, ideas — that is merely "popular." Avoid glibness, and give the glib tavern speaker and tavern keeper both a wide berth for their inanities. A Feller must be mighty wary not to wake up one day and find himself one more Babbitt or Dilbert.

Each month I share and create a couple of cartoons, [Violet and Joey](#), and [Padre Filius](#), and post them prominently in my monthly [publication](#). As I read this next passage, it seems to me that I have been following the advice of the author Kevin Dann.

[page 51] Put up your own signs and markers. Make them mirthful, inviting, and easily read, but by all means, make them *true*. Seek out those places and people from whom you can cultivate a sure sense of the *eternal*, so that you might effortlessly bar the commonplace *times* from your speech and listening, ever-wakeful ear. . . .

#2: SPEAK, always striving to know more than you say.

Chapter 3: Learn to DANCE!

Learning to dance can also mean learning to mis-dance, as Edward Emerson reveals in this memory of Thoreau dancing to a Scottish jig in a New Bedford parlor.

[page 53, 54] (Edward) pointed out that the mischievous dancer deliberately stepped on Bronson Alcott's toes to get his all-too-serious goat.

Thoreau was hyper-sensitive to his environment, as he described one "aggravated November day in 1855" when a flock of less redpolls (*acanthis cabaret*) flew close to him.

[page 55] My body is all sentient. As I go here or there, I am tickled by this or that I come in contact with, as if I touched the wires of a battery. I can generally recall — have

fresh in my mind — several scratches last received. These I continually recall to mind, re-impress, and harp upon. The age of miracles is thus returned. . .

I am surprised and enchanted often by some quality which I cannot detect. I have seen an attribut of another world and condition of things.

Kevin's poem "Gooseflesh" on page 56 caused me to chuckle in its first line. I include the first three lines here:

*Do geese get goose flesh
When thoughts sublime
Arise to take them out of Time?*

Old Cajun women have explained the appearance of gooseflesh as indicating "a ghost was walking upon your grave", but to me it seems that gooseflesh is likely an indication of a ghost walking through your human body. Movies often portray this very thing happening. In olden times, all humans could clairvoyantly experience the presence of ghosts. They could feel the gooseflesh when they observed a ghost walking through them. Super-sensible experiences in our time have lost their visual component, but we have kept their very real feeling component, so far as I can tell.

[page 58] Henry's flesh was the medium by which he made — before writing it down in his journal — a record of his love, as he practiced the art of reading and responding to the infinite gestures of the world. Art enlarges understanding by seeking wholes and then rendering them in figures that will make our flesh dance in sympathetic response.

Gooseflesh for Henry was like his dancing with Angels which accompanied him on his walks through the Concord woods.

[page 58, 59] Henry's physiognomically sensitive flesh took in the railroad and telegraph and other antebellum technologies and redeemed them; but he would have been vanquished I think by the Stamford "skyline" of corporate headquarters. The glass and steel towers stand just far enough apart from one another that there can be wedged between them a six-or seven-story multilevel concrete parking garage, so that the workers who enter them each morning need never step onto a street. This sequestering is accentuated by the massive, luxurious free dining rooms in each corporate headquarters building, freeing anyone from seeking out lunch fare downtown.

This passage inspired the following poem:

The Concrete Jungle

The concrete jungle
where blockheaded Tarzans swing
from cubicle to cubicle all day,
gliding home by night
to martini-toting trophy Janes,
never brushed by Angels
of the living Jungle.

~^~

To close out Chapter 3 Kevin suggests that we learn to dance in earnest.

[page 74] Dance out ignorance. Dance out superstition. Dance tyranny into oblivion. Others before us have done it, and so must we. Waltz, or jig, or jitterbug, the dances we do must make us *free*, not bind us. They should set in motion the spirit of Saint Paul:

"Not I, but Christ in me." A student of Saint Paul, Saint Augustine, once said: Learn to DANCE, else the Angels won't know what to do with you.

Chapter 3: Learn to DANCE!

In Chapter 4 we learn: Into the Vortex: CREATE!

Kevin's reminiscences of dumping large buckets of water on top a hill of gravel and watching the process of river formation reminded me of a job I had in the 1940s before they paved the street in front of our home in Westwego. In those halcyon days before Air-Conditioning, all our windows were open during the warm summers of southern Louisiana. On non-rainy days auto traffic would kick up dust which would be sucked in by our attic fan and coat our furniture, and my job, as the oldest of the children, was to water down Avenue F in front of our house to eliminate the dust. Our road back then was loose gravel, clay, and sand, pretty much like that which filled the gravel pile of Kevin and his friends's childhood. They poured water over the gravel for fun; I did it under orders from my mom. But I had the same kind of fun as they: I walked back and forth over the fifty foot stretch of the gravel road surface across our house lot. Once I had covered the dusty area with water, moving out of the way when cars crunched past, I began to form small lakes in some areas and then watch as the water created a river bed to follow down the gentle slope to the edge of the road. The patterns were different every day and fascinated me. I never once let on I was actually having fun doing this household chore. Often I would be rewarded by a nickel for a Dairy Queen ice cream cone from the shop at the end of our block, and that might not happen if I seemed to enjoy it too much, so I never let on. My rivers were fed from the city water supply via a hose, so they held no vibrant life as Kevin got in his buckets from the river, but the ever-changing morphology of dam and river creation was all there. It never occurred to me that I was having fun *creating* things, but it was likely my earliest memory of enjoying the process of creation.

[page 79] That whole summer, as we netted minnows or examined litmus paper or laid out the papery husks of dragonfly and damselfly nymphs, we went back in memory to our sand-and-gravel play of that first day, full of wonder that an inorganic channel in clay and sand and gravel could be turned into such a prodigious nursery for life.

Vortices are essential for nourishing our body. Our heart is a complex hydraulic ram which interrupts the flow of oxygen-starved blood from the veins and oxygen-rich blood from the lungs, then releases them into a swirling vortex which mixes the oxygen, so that oxygen-rich blood can fill the arteries which carry it into our body. A similar vortex receives nutrient-rich blood from our digestive system and mixes it into nutrient-starved blood from the veins so that it can carry energy-filled nutrients via our arteries into our muscle structures.

[page 86] At the physical level of reality, the human being — swirling about embryonically as the polonaise movement — begins life as a vortex, a lemniscate. The highest initiates in all places and times have said that we must "end" as a vortex too; that is, to incorporate into ourselves the very growth power of the Creator, to become Creators ourselves.

#4: Into the Vortex — CREATE!

In Chapter 5 we go Captaining Huckleberry Parties and learn to SENSE!

Ralph Waldo Emerson respected and admired his younger friend Henry, but was disappointed with his choice of career as an extra-vagant wanderer. He wished Henry would have been "an engineer for all of America," instead of "the captain of a huckleberry party." (Page xv of Preface)

[Page 89] Emerson's moniker "Captain of a Huckleberry Party," if a little cruel, was also accurate, for there was about the annual ritual of gathering the prosaic fruit a distinct atmosphere of carnival, a frugivorous charivari; and what are carnivals and

charivari if no invitations to open one's senses wide?

Growing up as a Cajun in South Louisiana, we made carnivals and charivaris out of every possible get-together. Snapping green beans is a mundane activity that can take most of the afternoon for a handful of people. But the huge tub of green beans had to be snapped and made ready to put into canning jars to get these self-sufficient farmers, hunters, and fishermen through the winters. As a child we ate green beans over rice at least once a week from the canning jars. Many people know the word zydeco, but few know it's origin is from "green bean music" — music played on fiddles and squeezeboxes while the family and friend are snapping green beans and jarring them. Zydeco comes from the word for beans (*haricots*) which said in Cajun French sounds to English speakers like zydeco! What herbivorous charivaris those haricots afternoons were!

Charivari in Cajun is pronounced as *shee-var-ee* and I was present at one given for my Grandfather Clairville Pierre Matherne when he married Belle after his beloved wife Nora died at 48 years old. The tradition was when a man remarries, he is given a charivari. The tradition faded away by the middle of the twentieth century, but in 1948 it was alive in the little bayou town of Bourg. All I can remember is that after the Wedding Mass at St. Ann's Church, we walked back to Clairville's house with family and friends, and suddenly a loud ruckus took place outside the house! Banging on pans and yelling from about a dozen folks who were throwing the town barber a *shee-varee*! They were invited inside and joined the wedding reception. You can see one at the end of the 1950s musical *Oklahoma!* which ends with a charivari.

Green beans, weddings, boiling up a largess of shrimp and crabs from a trawling trip, and many more events formed the seed of these boisterous gatherings which filled the life of the Cajuns I grew up among. Ask me to join a Huckleberry Party, I'm ready! A day spend picking a No.3 washtub of blackberries was a common occurrence for me, and huckleberries can't be that much different.

The most amazing thing about the vortex is that humans and the cosmos evolved out of the same vortex, the microcosm and the macrosocsm coming into being together. How did this begin? With a gigantic sphere we could call the primordial Earth, created as the womb of creation which spat out the Sun, Moon, our present Earth filled with human beings, and the planets.

[page 98] Before it spat out Sun and Moon — simultaneous with the human standing upright, to gain memory before consciousness — Earth was a living protoplasmic colloid, within which archaebacteria birthed both the oxygenated atmosphere and organ sulfur-nitrate-phosphorus and lime compounds, silica gels, manganese modules, gold, uranium. The human being was there, in embryo, at the birth of Earth, and of ourselves, too embedded in the surround to bear witness. In Steiner's very mysterious mystery school, one learned that earth and human being were twinned cosmic creations, their fates inseparably intertwined.

Our shared history with the animal kingdom takes place during *the long Lemurian afternoon* spanning the Cambrian to Cretaceous periods of esoteric paleontology. (Page 99) Rudolf Steiner discovered how this happened by doing some *Wellsian* time travel, not in a man-made machine, but in a human being, himself.

[page 99] Steiner did time-travel, venturing back via the *akasha* to the birth of Earth, and beyond. When he coined that injunction "The human being must become a vortex," he did so out of his own extra-ordinary sensory observations, having seen with his own acutely cultivated third eye that the vortex is stamped into the fabric of creation like no other sigil or sign.

With all our modern advancements, we humans have flattened our sensory perspective the way Medieval painters produced their images, completely lacking any 3-D perspective at all. We must attend to our senses acutely and perpetually and if we manage this, a sixth sense will arise from our current five. Sense your way toward the extrasensory.

#5: Captaining Huckleberry Parties: SENSE!

In Chapter 6 we'uns is gone fishin' and we learn to SYMPATHIZE!

Kevin goes fishin', not for fish, but for miracles, those small, everyday miracles we rarely recognize. We typically blow them off with a, "That was lucky!" But by doing so we miss a chance to recognize how to encourage these miracles in our life. In the Acton Public Library, Kevin stumbled into their spring book sale. The previous night as he finished his Captain of a Huckleberry Party performance, a woman in the audience offered him a place to sleep for the night. It was a Toad-worthy shelter with a driver to pick him up and dinner beforehand. This got Kevin thinking of *Wind in the Willows* and what a neat gift for his birthday that would make, and sure enough, he found a copy among the library's book sale, a 1966 "Junior Deluxe Edition" of the Kenneth Grahame classic illustrate by Tasha Tudor. Reminds me of the day I stopped by the St. Louis Cathedral Cathedral School in the French Quarter which had books for sale on its concrete stoop. There I located an original copy of Robert Heinlein's *Space Cadet* published in 1948. It was the same edition that I read from our Westwego Library when I was a kid, inhaling every science fiction book I could find. Kevin and I share a love for books, and allow miracles to happen in our lives. Here's another miracle, related by Henry in his *Walden*.

[page 111] Walden's last lines, unsurprisingly, are a Yankee folktale, of the "strong and beautiful bug" that hatches out of a farmer's venerable apple-wood kitchen table, having been imprisoned as a tiny egg in the living tree sixty years before.

Kevin closes Chapter 6 with this advice: "Be, dear reader, the bait for miracles, for angels, for your fellow human beings." This inspired me to pen a small poem:

Bait for Miracles

The best bait
for a miracle is
A change of attitude —
of course,
Learning this
is a miracle in itself.

~^~

Sympathize yourself into the creation, both large and small, and you shall become the bait for miracles.

#6: Gone Fishin': SYMPATHIZE!

Chapter 7 tells us when making worlds, learn to BEFRIEND!

Kevin had driven through New London several times for a Labor Day family gathering, but this time, he was walking through, and, in the slower pace of walking, you notice things.

[page 114] Sequestered in my car, I had never noticed the gorgeous turreted brownstone Public Library of New London building standing at the top of State Street. Approaching it on foot this last Sunday of March, the first thing I saw was a plaque dedicated to the library's patron, whaling magnate Henry Philemon Haven. Another bronze sculpture hovered over the fountain at the library's entrance. Above a pair of leaping whales stood a man holding an open book aloft in his left hand, a woman bearing a whale weathervane in her right. I had no idea that New London had been a whaling town, nor a leader in the West Indian trade.

Amazing to me that plaques and statues are still standing in the North while in the South they are being

taken down. Walkers like Kevin in the future will go through the South and wonder why nothing happened here. This thought prompted me to write a poem of a place where nothing happened.

People opposed to things are having things removed from public sites. What if some group suddenly appeared which was opposed to nothing? One could walk by there and never know.



Nothing Happened

The bronze plaque read:

"On this site in 1897 nothing happened."

What happened next?

People opposed to nothing
petitioned City Hall to have
the offensive plaque removed.

Now tourists walk past the site
As if nothing happened.

~^~

Thoreau knew of the new inventions of his time and wrote of them, the railroad, the telegraph, and the daguerreotype. He envisioned a time when people might be able to daguerreotype their thoughts and feelings, something which millions of people attempt to do daily with their Smartphones.

[page 120, Thoreau] Beauty and music are not mere traits and exceptions. They are the rule and character. It is the exception that we see and hear. Then I try to discover what it was in the vision that charmed and translated me. What if we could daguerreotype our thoughts and feelings! for I am surprised and enchanted often by some quality which I cannot detect. I have seen an attribute of another world and condition of things.

Henry knew how to see things in a new light; it often required only a slight move to one side to glimpse the contours previously undetected. His world was always fresh because he knew how to *make* a world not just *accept* it as a given.

[page 121] This was the talent of the physiognomist, to heighten meaning by tilting the head slightly, thereby catching the accentuated relief of surfaces too long seen as flat and featureless. This is the way to *make* a world, your world, not just passively accept the given.

Kevin reminds us when waking worlds, we should befriend Heaven.

#7: Making Worlds, BEFRIEND!

Chapter 8 speaks of Fires Within and Without: BURN!

My interest was first tweaked when Kevin revealed that the 12 Knights of the Round Table represented the 12 signs of the Zodiac. There is the fire which burns within each of us and without us in the Heavens, the Zodiac. It is a flame which burns with a certain pattern when we are spirit newly arrived in this physical body and this same flame lights our way through this lifetime.

[page 139] At Tintagel, I learned that "Arthur" was actually the name of the leader of a Mystery School that long antedated Christianity, and that a number of historical personalities had later taken "Arthur" as their name in tribute to the original Arthur. The Twelve Knights of the Arthurian Round Table were a picture of the twelve signs of the zodiac, and the cosmic powers contained within them, in service of earthly humanity.

Like the *Wind in the Willows* appeared to Kevin, when I needed a small miracle in my life, the Round Table appeared to me and filled my need.

Have you ever had a book fall off a shelf into your hands and open to a key passage you needed to read? You can even conjure up some advice by opening a book at random and running your finger down the page, only opening your eyes when your finger stops. The passage will speak to you, perhaps in enigmatic verse as the Oracle at Delphi did. This is what Kevin calls "book magic" — is it disappearing with the advent of electronic means of reading?

[page 156] It seemed to me that "book magic" would now be in retreat, given the increasing use of e-books and the widespread practice of reading online — both via computer and smartphone. But I also was sure that the elemental beings who could flip open flying books to just the right page for the hopeful diviner could adapt handily to the new technology.

#8: Let the Fires within and without BURN away the inessential.

Chapter 9 reminds us: In the Quiet Corner: BREATHE!

Since high school Kevin knew how to find a quiet corner to sit and think or to sleep peacefully for a night; it was in a cemetery.

[page 168] Sleeping in cemeteries had been my lifelong habit; I had worked every summer in high school as a landscaper in our town's largest cemetery, and while traveling had come to regard cemeteries as impromptu hostels offering the visitor both landscaped sanctuary and an open window to the town's past.

In this quiet corner of Connecticut as Kevin read headstones, a man in a pickup truck rolled by and asked, "Did you find Israel Putnam's grave?" Kevin eventually found it and discovered that after the Battles at Lexington and Concord, Putnam turned his plowshare into a sword and became a General and Revolutionary War hero, "ever attentive to the lives and happiness of his men."

[page 169] This generous memory filled me with melancholy, for somehow, on this gray day, I could feel nothing but my own lack of heroism, and the increasing sense that I had mapped out a fruitless pilgrimage that served no one but myself. I felt unfit to sing my own hero's song.

When the Vietnam war began I had gone through two years of required ROTC at LSU. It was my decision

to drop ROTC and focus on my degree in physics. By the time war was in earnest I had a degree and a child which kept me out of being Second-Louie Cannon Fodder, a decision I have never regretted. But in recent years I recalled a song we sang in jest in the ROTC, which I have come to call the "ROTC FIGHT SONG." I share it to dissipate any tinge of melancholy from my friend Kevin. Let this be our joint "hero's song."

*Some Mothers have sons in the Army
Some Mothers have sons overseas.
So hang up your battle star, Mother:
Your son's in the ROTC.*

*R O T C, it sounded like bullshit to me.
R O T C, and that's what it turned out to be.*

If that's not enough, perhaps this poem will lead Kevin to pick up his mandolin and find a quiet corner in which to create a song of joy.

Socrates Blues

*Soldier on, Philosopher Friend
Soldier on, Philosopher Friend*

sleep on stones of generals
sing your song of heroism
pour your blues into melancholy
till it flower into joy.

~^~

When Kevin's daughter Jordan wanted the golden teddy bear prize, he had to pop a red balloon on his first try. He didn't know that he could do it, but indeed he did. He did it! Kevin comments on his heroic first try success.

[page 169] Isn't it odd how, just before you do something you know you cannot do, you know you *can* do it; indeed, you *already have done it* — have leaped the brook, popped that single balloon, said the thing you could never say?

There is a lesson for all of us from Kevin's paragraph above. It is this: It is a poor memory which only works backwards, one that can only remember the past! Humans also can *Remember the Future*. Remember I said that *feeling* is the only remaining remnant of our original clairvoyance? Whereas once we could see and feel future events, now we can only *feel* future events. My [insight](#) is this: Remember the Future, it hums in the Present. Kevin *knew* he could pop the balloon because he could already *feel* having done it! That is the sense he had of having already done it. Love at first sight is the feeling of already having lived years in love with a person.

Remember: go into a quiet corner and breathe.

#9: Into the quiet corner: BREATHE!

Chapter 10 teaches us that the Respectable Folks WHISPER!

As a child, I believed in fairies, not because someone had convinced me of their existence, but because I had vivid memories of seeing them. As for people, as I grew older they convinced me of the non-existence of fairies, as happened to most of you, I imagine. It certainly happened to the people who arrived to hear Kevin speak in the library in Southbridge, Massachusetts. He wrote in his journal (Page 175), "I hope

today that *someone* will guess the answer to the riddle. If not, I think it's safe to say that:

THE FAIRIES ARE FORGOTTEN."

"Who are the Respectable Folks?" was the riddle he presented to the dozen or so people who arrived. He had planned to sing Henry's favorite song, "Tom Bowling" about a younger brother who had died at sea. No one guessed the answer after the first part of the song. The second part began, "*The respectable folks, — /Where dwell they? /They whisper in the oaks /And they sigh in the hay; /Summer and winter, night and day, /Out in the meadow, there dwell they. /They never die, /Nor snivel, nor cry, /Nor ask our pity /With a wet eye. . . .*" "Fairies," said Rebecca, in a calm, low voice, just as everyone in the circle turned to look toward the entrance, as three people came into the room. (Page 178)

Rebecca knew the answer and said in a whisper befitting a fairy herself. Since only Kevin heard her, he continued with the third verse of the song, and out came the attempts to solve the riddle, "Trees?" "Nature?" Kevin added another verse of these "creatures of a different destiny", but received back only silence. He invited Rebecca to give her answer again, and a collective sigh and chuckle went out from the group. (Page 181) One person, Margaret, grew up in Ireland and heard countless stories about fairies, but no one shared having seen fairies as a wee child. It was as if their wee childhood had been brainwashed out of them. Kevin commented about Rebecca:

[page 181] Rebecca was shy, unpretentious, and spoke in soft, matter-of-fact tones. She seemed just the sort of person the respectable folks would seek out to whisper in her ear.

Henry communed with angels and fairies in his dreams, as we all do, but so few can hear the whispers because to them "respectable folks" do not believe in fairies. Henry wrote about dreams:

[page 182, 183] A part of me which has reposed in silence all day, goes abroad at night, like the owl, and has its day. At night we recline, and nestle and in fold ourselves in our being. Each night I go home to rest. Each night I am gathered to my fathers. The soul departs out of the body, and sleeps in God, a divine slumber. As she withdraws herself, the limbs droop and the eyelids fall, and the nature reclaims her clay again. Men have always regarded the night as ambrosial or divine. The air is peopled then — fairies come out.

When you wish to honor the invisible, please whisper.

#10: Respectable Folks WHISPER!

Chapter 11 say: A Track Repairer in the Orbit of the Earth: LOSE!

Henry enjoyed walking the railway lines and telegraph lines they made possible between towns. He love the aeolian harp created by the wind wafting through the telegraph wires. But he also envisioned the negative side of the progress they brought.

[page 185, 186] Though Henry might make hay of the railroad's convenience, he was unabashed in calling out the havoc it wrought on human lives. "To make a railroad round the world available to all mankind is equivalent to grading the wide surface of the planet," he declared. "We do not ride upon the railroad; it rides upon us." Do not the computer and the "smart" phone ride upon us too?

I remember the good ole days, before the new millennium, when our children came to visit and we actually sat around the table talking to each other. Nowadays, we can only see their faces if we espy their reflection in their smart phones. I hate when someone wants to show me some cute cat trick or have me to listen some new book on tape — I have access to all these things if I want them, please do not shout at me using other people's noise, whisper to me as respectable folks do.

Henry wrote in *Walden* about losing a hound, a bay horse, and a turtle dove. (Page 186) Henry lost his brother John to lockjaw, a scourge in times before penicillin. My mother in the 1920s lost her younger brother Carlton to lockjaw also. She was always careful of our safety, especially around nails.

Henry lost his friendship with Ralph Waldo Emerson who did not appreciate Henry's closeness to nature, warning him, "Very seductive are the first steps from the town to the woods, but the End is want & madness." (Page 188) Their dispute was between the Old World of Emerson and the New World of Thoreau.

[page 188] While Emerson sought intellectual and spiritual treasures in the Old World, Henry dug deeper and deeper into this new World native land of his, convinced that the lode held there was as rich as anywhere upon Earth.

Most people do not realize that Henry only spent two years at Walden or know his reason for leaving Walden to return to Concord, or care. Kevin shares with us Henry's reasons.

[page 192] American has never learned the sacred lesson of surrender. "I left the woods for as good a reason as I went there," said Henry after two years in his woodland temple. Henry had every reason to be able to tell Emerson and Bronson Alcott and Margaret Fuller and even George Melvin the trapper: *It's been a good run. I left before the moss grew on me.*

Surrender that which no longer serves you.

#11: A Track Repairer in the Orbit of the Earth: LOSE!

Chapter 12 leads us back to Thoreau's roots as he says to us: TRANSCEND!

Henry slept in a trundle bed with his young brother John, but Henry always stayed up much later than John, causing his mother to ask why. Henry said, "Mother, I have been looking through the stars to see if I couldn't see God behind them." (Page 196) This was how Henry's transcendentalism began.

His zest for botany is best understood by his dogged attempts to get the secret of the *Azalea nudiflora* or pinxter flower. Kevin relates the details of Henry getting the secret location of the flower from George Melvin on pages 197 to 199, but the symbolic meaning of the flower is revealed by Kevin. The *pinxter* means Pentecost, the time when the newly baptized wear white robes and the time when white flowers of the pinxter blooms. Melvin had been returning with cuttings of this flower for ten years and finally Thoreau had added it to his botanical collection. Why was it so important to Henry? His reason was to complete his collection. Kevin reveals that the "pinxter flower was emblematic of a kind of personal Pentecost for Henry" — he who rejected any Christian beliefs was strongly attracted to the Whitsuntide or Pentecost flower. Henry wanted to speak in the tongues of all of nature and on his own personal Pentecost the Holy Spirit arrived for him.

Transcend the times, as all fools do.

#12: TRANSCEND!

