

Walnut Grove and Fort Langley

Time to lock eyes with an owl

Meditations From The Wilderness

by Charles A.E. Brandt.

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Last week, while driving into Vancouver at the dark and painful hour of 4 a.m. a white silhouette swooped in front of me. It was huge. And agile. Flashing just metres in front of the car it coolly cocked its head sideways fixing a gaze directly through the windshield at me. It was an owl, possibly hunting for breakfast along the median . . . and for me a fleeting yet exhilarating encounter with the wild.

Charles Brandt is a man totally immersed in the natural world. He lives above the Oyster River on Vancouver Island, and listens to the surge of spring freshet penetrate the walls of his hand built home.

He is also guardian to 30 acres of rainforest surrounding him like a primeval blanket where he observes deer, raccoons and ravens that follow him like a modern day St. Francis of Assisi.

Charles Brandt is a

B.C. Bookmark



Mark Forsythe

Catholic hermit priest with a reverence for wilderness and books. It is a life of meditation, work and prayer. He supports himself by restoring and binding books, and when he's not breathing life into old books he's reading from an extensive personal library.

Meditations From the Wilderness is quotations Father Charles has sifted from writings on nature, the environment and spirituality. Two that begin the collection illustrate a guiding sensibility. From Thomas Merton: "The whole idea of compassion is based on a keen awareness of the interdependence of all these living beings, which are all part of one another and all involved in one another."

And from ecologist Aldo Leopold: "A thing is right

when it tends to preserve the integrity, stability and beauty of the biotic community. It is wrong if it tends otherwise."

What follows are 150 brief writings - from Sioux elder Black Elk to American poet Walt Whitman and Chinese philosopher Lao Tzu. Reading them is something like walking the beach stumbling across those tiny smooth stones you can't resist holding and warming in your hand for a while.

"This earth which is spread out like a map around me is but the lining of my inmost soul exposed." Henry David Thoreau

"Now I see the secret of making the best persons. It is to grow in the open air, and to eat and sleep with the earth." Walt Whitman

Charles Brandt believes we've seriously alienated ourselves from the natural world and communion with it brings us closer to ourselves, and to understanding the world needs us.

He offers a simple suggestion to deepen this relationship that even the most jaded urban dweller

might be tempted to try. "Go out just before sunset when the sun and perhaps the planet Venus are in the western sky.

"There will come a moment when you will feel, in a direct experiential manner, the earth turning away from the sun . . . there will be a sense of wonder as you realize you are standing on the back of something like a giant mammal, turning ever so slowly and rolling through a vast ocean of time and space."

Then you might want to toss this pocket sized collection in your backpack, walk your favourite trail or riverside, and locate a comfortable stump. Time it right and you just might be fortunate enough to lock eyes with an owl.