

Genius Loci by Lyle Novinski
Summer Reunion Closure talk
July 16, 2006

This land has blessings in it, and it has intentions that are palpable, mythic in its form. The road up into the camp could have been in a different place, it could have moved up in a slow rise along Church Site, and curved into the opening where the parking lot is, it would have been ordinary, just a coming up onto a flat place to start the experience, but no, you come off the road, enter the gate, pass through the flats, and then there is the steep slot and then it all appears ahead of you. The Camp bursts upon your vision for the first time, cabin, dining hall, parade ground in one sweep, and a little later the lake is revealed to you. The center is seen whole and complete at once, which is a fundamental way of knowing, you grasp a reality in its wholeness, then you map it in its parts, and reassemble it. Think for a moment of the pathway of experience for the young Scout. First you burst onto the desired place, seeing the central images at once, then you move to your campsite, various trails, a gathering at retreat, a walk to the dining hall, directly toward the waters and cliff cover, and enter the large family setting of the wonderful dining hall. These pathways will be repeated all week, sites, events, up and down the hill, lake, dining hall, until the whole Camp is known. A final campfire recalls the week, and its events, a dying fire, a gash of falling embers and a rising cloud of sparks as we speak of the rising embers of our lives in Scouting, seeking to reach the dim profile of the trees, lit by the fire and our rising sparks. Then we return to the other world, and digest the experience. For many it will be repeated in slightly older bodies and consciousnesses, experiences that challenge, further merit badges, induction into the OA on one of its levels, and finally the vigil night, along with the thoughts and dreams by your own solitary fire.

Lives lived on this land have overlapped in the continuation of purpose for these seventy years. Scouts grew to Staff Men, Staff men layered in the next. When I returned on about the 60th there were three Staffmen, who were sons of my Staff serving with my sons. I knew their faces, there was no mistaking a Kranz, spitting image of his father, as it should be. My sons were not so easy, they have a greater variety.

The land itself has been regenerating in layers that match our own. Man feels an affinity with the other large growth from the land, the trees and our life spans are similar in most cases, and they stand in our way, blocking our movement in stabile and firm ways. Men and trees share a wonderful affinity. It is important to know that one of the first acts on this land was to replant it. Rows of young locusts planted in a series of contour furrows on the barren hillside above the parade field. Later, the pines sprinkled over the newly acquired Farm across the ford, little sprigs hidden for some years in the grasslands, now tall sheltering and wind lowing in high branched tallness long, high to the branch cover, the ground tawny with pine needle cover. This land was primeval, spots of which remain in the climax forest of maples on the Forest Trail. Parts were cleared for farmland, probably around 1870 or so, when this land was settled, and farmed until 1936, a period of about 66 years. Now it is back in the primeval growth, a patch of restored nature, growing at its pace, wearing the cliffs in its slow pace.

There was a short interruption in its life memory that is millenniums long, a short interruption of about 60 some years. A drop in the waters of time, a moment in the lifetime of this land.

The land is grateful, and we must treat it cautiously. Our few furrows into it did little damage, and even then our footsteps fall into silence in the fall, allowing the land to rebreath, wear its cover of snow, absorb the spring rains, and pushes forth the early blooming things, before it welcomes again a renewing crop of the young of man. There is a spirit at Canyon Camp, a spirit shared by the Native Americans that trod this area. With our coming a home was established in the perfect spot with the Rawleigh Cabin. There was medicine, strong medicine in this place, and it is with a kind of wonderful irony that the Rawleigh Cabin is named for the family that gave it. Rawleigh was a purveyor of patent medicines. My father peddled Rawleigh Patent Medicines as a young man. The overlaps are deep, the medicine is strong, and though we may now look on the patent medicine of an older era as a kind of hokey home remedy, they were effective, and were in many cases, the only palliative available to the country people of the first part of the last century. That their profits would be the source of our home on this land is appropriate, the word medicine still works in different ways. The nature of what is medically possible has advanced incredibly in our years here. The world has changed, We have been to the moon, we are sending probes to the far sides of our universe, our populations are changing, our cities have grown beyond belief in our years here.