

The Call of Wild Resiliency

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"Except during the nine months before he draws his first breath, no man manages his affairs as well as a tree does." –George Bernard Shaw

"Look at the birds of the air: they neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not of more value than they?" – Jesus, Mathew 6:26

"Resilience is the act of rebounding or springing back after being stretched or pressed, or recovering strength, spirit, and good humor." – Webster's New Twentieth Century Dictionary of the English Language

"Wild Resiliency is Life's 'love' of itself, its 'hunger' for the fullness of itself. It is the deep

impulse within for existence, for self-expression, for self-regeneration and renewal, for co-evolution and even self-transformation, as means for transcending the challenges and adversities that inevitably come Life's way."

The rushing white water of the rapids below Aragon Canyon camp is a pleasant and promising backdrop at mile 10, on the Chama River, below El Vado Dam. The water's soft roar is omnipresent. It is a vibration in the air that is amplified off the eastern cliff face opposite camp and across the river. This sound of water rushing back to the ocean fills the very air one inhales, whether with joy for the beauty of the place, or for the beginning boater, perhaps with some sense of trepidation in anticipation of the class II/III rapid yet to be run. This is a Northern New Mexico Wild and Scenic River setting of red and yellow and violet and white craggy rock faces, with tall pines and oaks, in a serpentine river canyon.

There is also Aragon Canyon itself, which offers a short and sweet hike up the draw, or a more adventurous hike to the canyon rim with a view of the distant Brazos cliffs. This nearly two thousand foot impressive bulwark of a sheer granite face, with a summit just over eleven thousand feet, is 1.8 billion-year-old-rock. The village of Brazos sits at its base and is perhaps 30 miles to the East from where one would stand on the Canyon rim.

Back in camp however, I sit in the comfort of my rafter's chair and sip my morning coffee, await the arrival of the sun's first rays and marvel at the expression of

Wild Resiliency in front of me. I marveled at it some twenty years ago when I first came around the blind curve in the river, just above this camp and rapid. And I still marvel at this expression of life's tenacity.

Here, is "Christmas Tree Rock," as it is known in the boating community. It is a solid room-sized boulder sitting center left in the river, humped on one end and then flowing down into the shape of a shallow bowl on the other. Sitting in the womb of that depression is a twelve foot tall fir tree, growing out of whatever little bit of soil and nourishment it is able to find from within the spaciousness of its rooting there. The tree was but a few feet tall when I first saw it, and now it has weathered not only numerous winters more but also a prolonged draught. Yet it thrives.

It is this impulse towards thriving, here made particularly visible amidst the barest sufficiency of resources, that I think of as '*Wild Resiliency*.' This tree captures the idea of *Wild Resiliency* for me because it is an expression of Life tenaciously reaching for itself, vigorously even, as if it wanted *this* life.

How is it, I ask myself, that life exists? And not only exists, but thrives? And thrives even under conditions of stress and duress and scarcity? Why is it some people thrive under circumstances that make of others bitter old men or women, should they live so long as to enjoy their misery?

How was it, I myself, found my way into a love of life, and a love of self? Surely a child who begins suicidal ideations while in the third grade might as well be the seed of a tree fallen by happenstance into a small

crack upon a large granite boulder, himself a loner sitting in the middle of a river.

This personal history and its gifts are part of why the concept of *Wild Resiliency* calls to me as it does. The pervasive pattern of renewal I have found in nature, of birth-propagation-death and rebirth, mirror my own journey of adventure to the degree I can no longer separate my identity from this environment I am embedded within. So I write here with the voice of an insider, trying to discern and describe what it is like in here, and not with the voice of an objective observer. I write as a simple self, seeking to understand how it is Life is able to thrive and blossom and diversify; how it is, Life propagates wonder and mystery throughout my life and across our little planet, and perhaps even across vast solar systems. *Wild Resiliency* is my conceptual synopsis for the requisite biotrophism, 'Life orienting or turning toward Life,' or biophilia, as ecologist Edward O. Wilson calls the "love of life."

I think of *Wild Resiliency* as Life's impulse-of-loyalty to the expression of its fullness, lying within, within even a seed. It is an expression of resiliency that incorporates but is also more than Webster's "rebounding or springing back." *Wild Resiliency* incorporates our capacity to 'spring forward' in response to life's challenges, in the way that the Douglass Fir and Ponderosa Pine evolved thicker bark to protect themselves from forest fires, and in so doing, changed the forest as well themselves.

Wild Resiliency is how Mother Nature does it!

Wild Resiliency is thus more than the elasticity, flexibility or adaptability of a man to unpleasant or challenging circumstances; it is thus more than the

sustained driving-ambition which propels some people through adversity into 'success,' while ignoring the attentional needs of say, their children, or their own soul; it is thus more than the mechanical memory of a rubber band with its ability to return to an original shape.

Wild Resiliency is life's 'love' of itself, its 'hunger' for the fullness of itself. It is the deep impulse within each of us for the taste, touch, smell and company of existence, for self-expression, for self-regeneration and renewal, for co-evolution and even self-transformation, all as means for transcending the challenges and adversities that inevitably come Life's way. Eyes with the developed capacity for seeing relationships of reciprocity, in which Life is both transformed by its environment, and in which life also shapes the very landscape of its womb, can perceive this dynamic interaction all about us.

The idea of *Wild Resiliency* is a reminder to me that I too am a dynamic landscape, that I am embedded within community, and that Life's capacity for evolutionary self-renewal and transformation is mine to claim, or not. I think of *Wild Resiliency* within myself as the remembrance of, the knowledge of, indeed even a vision of the willingness to live from within the wholeness of who I am, of who I can be. I think of it as a resting in the surety of my own center, as a living out of the depths of the Breath-of-Life within; this, despite the world's demands for amnesia, for fragmentation of my very Self, for orienting my life out of fear and terror rather than in accordance with the nurturance of love, mutuality and connectedness. *Wild Resiliency* is thus both my capacity for transformation, and my rootedness into a 'Ground-of-Being,'

together out of which I can synergistically explore the vitality and uniqueness of what it is to be a Self, in this world.

Our tree, for example, in its reaching for life from out of its innate center, may one day even crack open *this* rock, split its own womb apart, as its roots explore miniscule cracks and seek the promise of moisture and soil below. This tree is both shaped by the context of its environment, and it is shaping its immediate environment in small ways as well, ways that promote its own nourishment. *This tree, as do I, lives in a participative universe.*

As surely as is my own, this tree's health and hardiness is related to its ability to orient its structures toward health and wellness, to participate in symbiotically mutualistic relationships. Fungi, living on the tree's roots, for example, aid the tree in its uptake of water and nutrients from the soil in exchange for a share of the tree's produced carbohydrates and amino acids. This widespread symbiotic relationship between higher plants and fungi is called *mycorrhiza*, and also supports our tree's immune system, helping protect it from various diseases and parasites.

The structure of the pine's needles, down into the cellular level, are filled with the wonder of such relationships. Their green tint is due to the presence of chloroplasts, genetic structures with their own DNA yet like mitochondria are present outside of the cellular nucleus, and are thought by biologists like Lynn Margulis (*Symbiotic Planet, A New View of Evolution*) to be the 'domesticated' ancestors of bacteria, now living in intercellular partnership. It is the chloroplasts that, through photosynthesis, transform the raw energy of

sunlight and carbon and water into the fuel of carbohydrates.

The pine's needles also collect dew out of the morning's moist air, and they shade from the noon sun the small bowl-of-soil the tree is rooted in, reducing precipitation's evaporation out of the rock lined bowl of nourishment. This is a world, again like my own, in which even a shadow casts an influencing environmental presence.

Our tree's presence on this rock also collects dust unto itself from out of a blowing wind, thus incrementally increasing, in the way snow drifts around a fence post, the size of its soil collection, as also does the slow shedding and decay of its own needles. Other grasses and plants opportunistically add themselves to this growing community of complexity. They too exploit the rock's small cracks and crevices as they take root in the growing bowl-of-soil.

Lichen, however, is a 'plant' here that does not even need the bowl-of-soil. It 'roots' into the very surface of the rock itself. Lichen, actually two independent organisms masquerading as one, is a fungus (the body we see) and a bacteria (a cyanobacteria which is neither plant nor animal) living in symbiotic relationship. The fungus adheres to the rock and pirates, or exploits, or perhaps partners with, the photosynthesizing bacteria for its food production. In this complexity of relationships, of life eating life, the boulder itself, between the lichen and tree and other plants and the erosional forces of temperature and wind and water, is ever so slowly being transformed, digested. Sloooooowly, yes, but it is so. Everything in our forest environment, within this multi-hued and textured Tapestry of Relationships, is alive, and is food for something.

So the tree and the forest community are also helping shape the rock, eating it, if you will, through their loyalty to the life force within, loyalty to the impulse for life that lay in a former self, a seed or a spore, or an ancestor. It is a loyalty that is visible in the vigor of our tree.

It is the loyalty of *Wild Resilience* that resides within each of us as well, awaiting simply, our remembrance. The question this loyalty asks of us is this: "Can we trust our own deep needs, desires and hungers?"

Are we willing to trust the fire that burns within, housed as it is, rooted as it is, in this animation of conscious carbon and water we call our body? Are we willing to risk the path of our own *wild joy*? The call of our soul for itself? Our greatest potentiality? What is our capacity to orient toward the fullness and wholeness of Life? Can we allow ourselves to trust our own rooting into the womb of the earth; our belonging?

Try it! This tree knows how to belong. This wild-wisdom is evident throughout the forest I now sit within. Its patterns of renewal are evident in the rainbow trout, thriving within the environment of the Chama's cold water, as it rises to the surface to feed off the hatching May Flies. The now hollow, delicate, and golden locust skeleton, there on the decaying log at river's edge, with its back split open where the molting locust emerged out of a body-skeleton grown too constraining, is testament to the self-transformative capacities of such belonging.

And look at this, will you? It is the skin of a snake, turned inside out as the serpent crawled out of a former self in an ancient ritual of self-renewal, a rebirthing of a self. This testimonial skin is now sun bleached and dried

and delicate and thin. It has a translucent paper like quality, but is yet lightly imprinted with darker blotches on its back. I do not know what kind it is, though surely bull snake or rattler, gauging by its size and the markings. But this is the most amazing thing; one I have never seen before: Two feet of this dried snakeskin is on the surface of the ground for us to carefully examine. The remainder, of approximately equal length guessing by the visible diameter and taper, disappears before our eyes down a hole into the ground! Cool, huh?

And look at the tiger swallowtail butterfly, golden-yellow with black strips, fluttering here and there as if going nowhere. It may live but a few weeks while covering a few hundred miles before eggs are again laid and the process of metamorphosis, transforming from caterpillar to chrysalis to butterfly, continues.

And look at this, here. See the delicate spider's web, strung between the branches of the Gambles Oak, swaying ever so gently in the morning air. But look at the drop of water on this thread. Now stand where I am. Look close. Can you see the rainbow in the dewdrop? This is worth the smiles and laughter that escape us as we glimpse a vision of fractal worlds mirrored within worlds without end.

But we are not done. No. I want you to see this too. Here. Let's take a short wander through the forest and look at some of the old growth trees. See, here's an old ponderosa with a lightening strike on it. See this long narrow scar spiraling down and around the length of the tree? That's it. And look at the base of the tree. See the old fire scar here? It is probably from a number of fires actually, but most of the old trees here have them. They need ground fires to come through and burn out the forest

litter and low fuels. Such low intensity fires are part of the forest's immune system, speeding the return of carbon and nutrients to the soil and preventing infestations of insects and disease.

The fires and the trees, the locust and butterfly and trout and decaying log and spiders and snakes too and dewdrops and rainbows, they all belong. And they 'know' it, in the way their deep nature knows it, instinctively, or through essence, without choice, but through simple being.

And my bet, based upon my own journey, is this: Buried within the cultural debris of our religions and politics and consumerism, like all our relations on the tree of life, we yet possess knowledge of our belonging. I also believe we can trust this belonging, this simple being-ness that rests as knowledge and as longing in each of our hearts – if we but choose to open to the *Wild Resiliency* we were born with!

Here are the First Principles by which life's wild resiliency operates, to aid our remembering of this innate wisdom. They are evident and visible throughout the forest, from the mountain lion to the chickadee, down even into the cellular structures of our tree.

1. Move toward and open to that which sustains and nourishes the wholeness of who you are.
2. Move toward and open to that which sustains and nourishes the wholeness of your community.
3. Move away from, and close off to, challenge or confront, that which is toxic or noxious to yourself or to your community, from that which would eat you.

Now, to actually orient in accord with these simple movements of *Wild Resiliency*, of opening and closing

through access to the wild-wisdom within, we must re-member our capacity for deep discernment. Like our tree, our lives also are embedded within a Tapestry of Relationships. And there is much in our world too that would feed upon us (predators and parasites...), while presenting as friend or self-image enhancing product, as idea or belief or even emotion.

That new Lexus we want may only be a shadow of what we truly hunger for, belonging and respect, for example, and may only deliver illusive shadows of either. Wild-wisdom's fear, that serves to warn us of danger, is indeed not the viral fear that is peddled by some preachers and politicians. That new digital camera I wanted, as a toy of play and entertainment and a means of capturing images of *Wild Resiliency* embodied, may only serve to remove me from actually being present to this wondrous moment of life, in which I eternally sit. The camera's LCD 1.5" viewfinder may become my window through which I look out upon the world, a world that with 100 billion galaxies and us still counting, indeed, has no roof. What a sorrow, if I were to so constrict and constrain my vision and perception!

What a tragedy to have my life's perception eaten by a camera!

But so it is, within everything that comes our way, person or technology or thought or idea, there is the opportunity to feed and nourish our deep hungers and needs, there is the chance something may feed upon us, and there is the opportunity to become lost in the shadow worlds of illusion and delusion and collusion, in the magic mirror on the wall of the world, into which we peer every day.

This challenge of discernment is ours to meet, or not. The call of *Wild Resiliency* is ours to respond to, or not.

This life force that lives within us, that animates us, that would have us be authentically and fully and uniquely ourselves, is ours to choose loyalty to; or not.

May your own loyalties be as clear and crisp as those of our tree. May your roots grow strong and deep. May they find the soil of deep nourishment and the symbiotic relationships that sustain vitality. May you drink of the waters that quench your deep thirst. May your trunk be flexible, bending in the fierce winds of our time just enough, to not break, and to hold you with your head up, so you may see where it is we are, and where it is you would go. May your branches too, reach out into the world to embrace and hold that which is dear to you. May you enjoy the abundance-of-sufficiency, for truly, therein, is joy indeed.

The Forest knows these things, as does the *Wild Resiliency* residing within that we are each born with, that is innate to us. Perhaps, if we listen to the deep silence of the forest, if we allow ourselves to perceive deeply into time as the old growth forest knows it, as those 100 billion galaxies spiraling ever further out into space know time, we too can re-member the hardy-wholeness of our own Being. Certainly, as surely as I sip my morning coffee and sit in my chair, await the sun's tinting of our tree with its first rays of light and listen to the river and the forest speak to me of *Wild Resiliency*, this Self-remembrance is the challenge of our time.

**Questions and Exercises for Exploring
The Seven Keystone Ecological Processes
of Wild Resiliency**

1. Our Ground of Being: A World in Which to Be

- What is the nature of your world?
- What are the mythologies and belief systems that inform and sustain this worldview?
- If you were to map the landscapes of this world, what are its contours, shapes, textures and edges?

2. The Power of Arrival: A Self in the World:

- Who are you? How expansive can you allow your identity to be?
- What is your capacity for arrival in the world, for showing up? Where do you best express this capacity?
- Where do you respond to the world by wanting to shrivel up, or hide?

3. A Tapestry of Relationships: The Ecological Self:

- Where do your loyalties lie; who is your community, your tribe, your family?
- What are the mutualistic, and the parasitic, relationships in your life?
- How clear and clean are your boundaries? Where do they serve you, and where, when or how do you serve them?

4. The Fires – of Renewal and of Wounding:

- Where is fire (passion...) burning at healthy intensity in your life?
- Where is there an absence of fire? What needs to be consumed, or returned to a more elemental form, to provide you with nourishment?

- Where in life is there danger of fire burning at destructive levels, consuming your livelihood or relationships?

5. Shadows Reach: Transformation and the Unknown:

- Where and how do you affirm the Shadow Realms of Death, Transformation, and the Unknown?
- What is it you are afraid or unwilling to express or to look at in yourself or in the world; the conversations you refuse to have; the dreams you will not remember?
- Identify and explore a time in your life when transformation served you, or when it did not.

6. The Winds of Change, and Dynamic Balance

- Where and how do you affirm ambiguity, paradox and change?
- Where and how do you hold to rigidity, inflexibility, to patterns of refusal and denial of what is, or what might be?
- Where are you out of balance? What are your life practices for regaining balance lost?

7. The Waters of Life: Wellness, Hardiness and Wholeness

- Where and how do you quench your thirst for renewal?
- What is your practice and discipline for affirming life, everyday?
- Where and how do you turn away from, or toward, your thirst for the fullness of your own potential, your Joy, your passions and desires?