

Resurrection and Reincarnation

By: John Day

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Bio: A lifetime resident of Chicago, retired and now living in rural northwestern Illinois. Interested not only with restoration of his own land has become involved in several organizations committed to the reclamation and restoration of private and public lands with emphasis on native prairies and woodlands.

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I had spent my entire life in Chicago. Chicago with its din of traffic and the rush of people. The anonymity of the crowd. The smells of exhaust fumes, jet fumes and rotting garbage. The madness of the urban environment.

So the time had come to look for the weekend place. A get away. A small place in the country to relax and rejuvenate. And so the search began for a place where that part of sanity I had lost could be restored.

When I first came to this land it had been battered and bruised. The years of misuse and exploitation had left it in a sad state. Few trees remained. The meadow was over run with weeds. The outbuildings, all made of corrugated steel and once a shiny silver, had rusted and turned reddish brown. Layers of dried hog manure blanketed the ground next to an old shed.

The house was typical of the Midwestern farm. White clapboards hung on a structure that was a hodge-podge of additions that had been hung on to a once small, square single room shack that was expanded over the years.

I walked the land. Across the field that had once been planted in corn. Across the top of a hill where cattle had once grazed. Through a meadow that led to a stream that had worked its way under and through the roots of a giant cottonwood to form a small waterfall.

Standing by the stream a gentle breeze rippled the meadow grass causing to roll like the waves on a lake. The wind brushed against the side of my face like the breath of a woman whispering in my ear. "Here. This is the place."

And so the land was purchased. And the weekend trips became a journey not merely to a small refuge in the country, but a mission. A mission to resurrect the land. To restore it to its once simple glory. To bring back song birds and wildlife.

The dry, weedy field that once bore corn was restored to native prairie. The hill where cattle had grazed was replanted with trees. The meadow was burned and the foreign, invasive weeds destroyed. The stream that had run underneath the cottonwood now ran into a small pond that had been built for wildlife and amphibians.

Now, near twenty years have gone by. I walk across the top of the meadow looking across the prairie. The giant compass plants, black eyed susans, purple cone flowers as well as dozens of other different forbes create an explosion of color and mingle with the tall grasses. The big bluestem, Indian grass and Canada rye swing lazily back and forth in the wind.

The giant cottonwood now has companionship. To the east side of the ancient tree grow a thousand trees that have been planted. White and red oak, black walnut, black cherry and others. The meadow grasses and flowers bathe in the sunshine along the western slope of the land.

From the pond can be heard the sounds of different frogs and toads calling back and forth to one another. Dragonflies skim across the water's surface as tree swallows perform their aerial acrobatics and glide over the water. In the distance the giant turkey vultures can be seen soaring above the fields while the red tail hawk flies overhead. All the while the other songbirds call out their tunes. The phoebe, the bluebird, the catbird, all the different woodpeckers as well as finches and orioles. The red wing blackbirds nesting in the

grasses of the meadow and prairie trill their songs in search of a mate.

Off in the giant cottonwood the call of an oriole can be heard and I'm unsure if the buzzing noise is a swarm of bees or a ruby throated hummingbird come back from it's winter sabbatical.

Walking across the top of the ridge I think of the arrowheads I've found and the ancient people who once lived here. The same people who had built earthen mounds and effigies in the shapes of birds and bears at the top of bluffs along the Mississippi River.

Those ancients were a community of people who never questioned their beginning. They believed that they had always been here. Forever.

The ancients were one with their world. God, religion, the animals and all of the surrounding hills, rivers, woodlands and prairies moved through time in harmony with one another. The moon, sun, stars and seasons came and went in agreement with each other.

I think of these early people and thoughts of my own ancestors tug at my heart. I come to realize that when the ancients from this land were building their mounds and effigies, the ancients of Europe and Asia were building mounds of their own. And as great in size as the Great Pyramid of Egypt may be, there is to the south of here, along the Mississippi river, an earthen mound as large the Great Pyramid.

Long ago, all of us were once one people, somehow scattered across the earth in all directions.

A long tail weasel hops across my pathway and stops to stare into my eyes. For a brief moment there seems to be some sense of recognition before this beautiful creature scampers off into the tall grass.

The wind begins to rise. Looking off to the west, looking so far I can see where the earth meets the sky, the huge, tall black storm clouds seem to be taking on a life of their own. They are moving towards me and will soon be bringing thunder, lightning and sheets of rain to cleanse the land.

As I look around I recognize that I have helped to resurrect this land. With some small bit of help, the land has healed itself. The land itself, being it's own living entity, has returned to it's rightful place in the cosmos.

But what of me ? Can there be resurrection for one who still lives ?

No. Obviously not.

There is, however, reincarnation. Rebirth.

Standing on the top of the ridge, looking across this resurrected land I feel that sense of rebirth. I walk in harmony with the land. I am at peace with all that surrounds me here. I have become one with the land.