

## **MROP: An Encounter With The Enchanted Universe** by Daniel R. Todt

Even though the primary focus of the MROP is not about creating bonds with the other men, communing with God, nor connecting with nature, these things seemed always and everywhere to accompany and flow from our reverent submission to those rites. At least, that was my experience when participating with over one hundred other men in the August 2004, MROP at Ghost Ranch. In fact, I would say that those four days in the high desert were nothing less than jam-packed with one grace-filled moment after another.

One such occasion for me involved an unprecedented encounter with nature. That encounter confirmed the completion of the first half of my spiritual journey; and, thus, my entry into the second half of that journey. So, too, it convinced me that “All has meaning; it is still an enchanted universe; God is in all things waiting to speak and even to bless” (Quest for The Grail).

On Sunday, then, the fourth day of this MROP, after sitting alone and silent for several hours in an open space that lay beneath a clear blue sky and a warm bright smiling desert sun, I found myself actually communing with a small band of fir trees that surrounded me. In other words, I felt some sort of positive presence and energy flow from them. At once, I stood up; and though naked, I felt no shame nor embarrassment. And in that upright free position, I could not but smile and laugh aloud, having sensed that these fir trees and I shared much in common.

So, too, I could not but fall to my knees and weep, when starting to leave this most sacred time and space. For it was only then that I saw a gross deformity in one of the fir trees that stood alone but not far from where the other trees and I had been standing.

Upon seeing that tree from this different viewpoint, I noticed that at six inches from the ground, his trunk had split in a manner unlike most trees. And so, while the one side of his trunk continued to grow upwardly as is normal, the other side made a distinct right angle, growing parallel to the ground for awhile before it, too, finally began to ascend. What’s more, I also noticed that those two parts of this fir tree’s trunk reconnected later on in his life. And where they had been joined together, I could not pull them apart. Finally, adding much to my amazement, I saw that his trunk now formed what looks exactly like a printed capital letter “D.”

By then I knew full well that I had met my counterpart. In other words, this fir tree, like me, had been deeply wounded, many times wounded, over a period of time during his early childhood. Much later on, however, those wounds had become sacred. At last, he was at one with himself, no longer at odds with his unacceptable side. Moreover, he stood, not taller but, broader than the other fir trees in this particular forest.

How interesting that this tree had been the only one to whom I had given a name, and that before I had seen his deformity! I had given him the name, Daniel. So, too, he was the only tree to whom I had actually introduced myself. “Hi, you must be Daniel. Well, I am Fir Tree. Glad to meet you.”

What a healing moment to have seen, touched, kissed, knelt down before, wept with, and embraced this Daniel, an integrated man, who quietly stood with arms outstretched and opened wide, willing and ready and set apart for the purpose of being a “shield, shade, and shelter” for many others! Elated, I danced most of the way back to my cabin. And within an hour of my return, I took pencil in hand and with one felled swoop wrote the following poem in my journal—which poem has now become the conclusion to a quartet I began writing in December of 2002, entitled, “Fir Trees and Forest Dwellers.”

Yes, I am a fir tree  
And forest dweller,  
Living in obscurity,  
At home and at peace—  
Fully connected—  
With all the other fir trees  
Of The Great Forest.

We fir trees vary in form and color:  
Some of us are tall and slender;  
While others are big and bulky;  
Some are old and look weary;  
While others are young and strong;  
And some of us are darker,  
So much darker, than all the rest.

A few of us stand alone—  
Though not apart.  
Most of us, however,  
Are bunched closely together.  
Whether alone or not,  
We are one in soul,  
Substance and glory;  
Because we are rooted,  
Now rooted,  
All now deeply rooted,  
In the ground from which  
We have all come  
And to which we shall  
All return one day.

And so, we know each other;  
We know each other bears,  
In one form or another,  
The Great Wound.

Yes, though crooked  
And gnarled  
And full of holes,  
We know,  
We now know,  
That Wound,  
Our wound,  
Our many wounds  
Have become for us  
And for many others,  
Sacred Wounds,  
Through which God  
And Christ in us  
Has come alive.

So, let there be no doubt:  
We men, we initiated men,  
We beloved sons and brothers,  
Belong to The Great Indwelling,  
A most holy communion,  
Through which new life,  
The Life,  
The Great Spirit  
Of Life  
And Love,  
Is now flowing,  
Overflowing,  
Now.