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## Circle Tale, March 2013 Vision Quest

*Vision Quest.* To anyone in the market for a change in their life, you'd be hard pressed to find a more compelling combination of words. Together, these words are full of promise, hope and salvation. Let's go!

Alas, it's not that simple. Many years ago, when I first learned about the details of a Vision Quest, I flatly stated "not for me". *Camping? Where's the Concierge? Not eating? Why, what did I do wrong? And sharing my feelings with strangers?* Not a chance.

But live long enough and you learn the danger of saying "never". That word inevitably brings down the hammer of fate. Sure enough, by April, 2012, I found myself in enough of a state of confusion that a Vision Quest, replete with inconveniences, suddenly seemed like a viable escape route, if not a good idea.

Actually, it was the notion of *solitude* that attracted me. The thought of spending 48 hours alone with nature was so antithetical to my city life, it felt like the perfect opportunity to find clarity and answers. The absence of distraction was the magnetic force that pulled me toward the Vision Quest.

So by early June, I was fully prepared (or so I thought) and on my way to the eastern Cascades. I won't challenge the confines of this newsletter with the details of my Quest, but I will say this: Weather elbowed its way into my solo time and became my constant companion, leaving Solitude out in the cold. No wait – I was out in the cold. And the rain. And hail. And lightning. It's clear that this unseasonal weather was essential to the lessons I needed to learn on my Quest. It was perfect.

Another salient lesson came from the circle ceremony in which I held council with... my *Self*. My Self is the ragtag collection of parts within me that I love, hate, appease, embrace and defy every day. This "inner council" proved to be quite animated, insightful and productive.

Overall, my experience in the Cascades was potent. It led me to a well of strength and courage I didn't know I had. In the ensuing months, those qualities have grown tributaries that continue to fertilize my life in ways that have yet to be fully realized. I have gained permission to honor my soul; learned to counter caution with risk; and continue to develop this odd little knack for hearing my heart.

My fear going into the Quest (the most magnificent among many) was that of failure. I now realize I was operating under a faulty definition of success. I believed that if my solo journey was not transformative in a concrete and measurable way by hour 48, the entire expedition would be an exercise in futility and it would be *my* fault. But a Vision Quest is not a terminal exercise. That singular, sacred time – which is intense and invigorating – is not the Quest in its entirety. Both Vision and Quest unfold over time, especially if regularly fed and nurtured.

I learned a botanical term recently that serves as a metaphor for this concept: *vernalization*. This describes the ability of a plant to flower or germinate only after it survives the prolonged cold of winter. Even after vernalization, a plant may require additional seasonal cues or weeks of growth before it will actually flower. So when I see those spectacular blossoms in the Chicago parks this spring, I plan to give them a nod and say, "Yes, I know how you feel".

*If you have a tale to tell, contact the PeerSpirit office and we'll help you share it.*