

On The Isle Of Bright Hope

Summer Camp for the Mind

“Welcome To The Isle Of Bright Hope,” the sign said, and since there was no one there to meet me, I pulled my canoe up on the sandy shoreline, and took off my life preserver. The place was quiet, except for the sound of the water lapping against the shore, and the occasional call of far-away gulls. There was a slight whisper from the wind as it made its way inland through the woods. Other than that, all was still.

I was a visitor here, having come on this journey to write down what I saw. It was a special assignment, but that part of the story lies outside the boundaries of this narrative. Suffice it to say I loaded my canoe with the necessary trimmings of a camper and journalist, and embarked downstream on a fine day. The bends in the river were guidance enough, and I followed them until they opened out into a wide bay, which held in its palm an island, and this was The Isle of Bright Hope.

It was impossible not to notice a sense of deep peace as I approached across the water. The place felt very natural, and even the fact that no one was waiting to meet me seemed like it was part of a plan. There was only a sign to welcome me - that was all.

I picked up my backpack and belongings and set off through the woods. I hadn't actually brought very much; the instructions had indicated that I should come “light.” I had tried to comply, but canoes have no trouble carrying a few extra things, whereas humans walking through the woods begin to feel the extra weight quickly. Before long I began to wish I'd followed the instructions a little more closely.

After stopping to rest a couple times I noticed someone coming toward me through the wood. “Welcome,” the stranger said, though it soon came to me that I was actually the stranger. He knew the land well, and the sea too, I later learned, and while I was a bit unsure at first who he was, he never seemed to question who I was at all. “Come, may I help you with your bags?” I handed some of the weight over with a feeling of relief. Whoever he was, he certainly knew my most immediate need.

“Your place is over here,” he said, and began steering off to the left a bit until the woods ended in a sloping section of green meadow. A stream ran through it, and a small cabin was nestled in some fir trees a short way down. “You'll find it's all ready for you.” Setting my belongings outside the door, he nodded his head and walked on down to another stretch of woods till he was out of sight.

The cabin was perfect for my stay, and I discovered to my surprise that not only was it unnecessary for me to have packed any camping gear, but all the tools I needed for writing were there as well. I found a closet, clean and swept, put all my things there, and except for taking out the fudge my Grandmother sent with me, I never opened my bags the whole time I was there.

I began to wonder about the place as I looked around. Why had my instructions indicated I should pack light? And when I came with too much, why did someone arrive to help me carry it? And the cabin - it was as if they knew I was coming, and filled it not only with what I needed, but even with an eye to my personal preferences! Again that sense of peace found me. There was food, clothing - not a lot, but more than enough. I began to understand why so little explanation had come in my assignment. I don't think I would have believed it. In this case, it was better to learn by going there, rather than asking for descriptions in advance.

I could tell you more, but this is already enough. Besides, I was sent to write about the island, not about me and my experiences. The sun went down in a cascade of rose and violet, and I slept with not even the trace of a dream.

Day One

I dressed in the early morning, took the fine writing tools that had been provided, and stepped outdoors. I wasn't sure where I was going, but I no longer worried about that. The gently sloping meadow seemed to beckon, so I followed it for awhile, and then down a winding road, till I came to another open meadow where tents were set up. But the tents, colorful as they were, couldn't begin to tell the story. What really caught my eye was the collection of hot air balloons, all poised as though they would lift off at any moment. They swayed back and forth a little, keeping time with their own internal rhythms, and making small gestures which showed how quickly they could respond to the least little wish of the wind. As I stood taking it all in, a voice a little to my left said, "This is the Meadow of High Promise. Here you will witness the first event."

I turned, and there was my friend from the day before. "Hi," I said. "I was hoping you would return. Yesterday I forgot to thank you, and to ask your name."

"I'm Branderen," he said. "I'm one of the messengers. Are you ready to begin?"

I looked at him. He was so relaxed, unrushed. And yet his conversation contained none of the usual smalltalk. In just one phrase he had moved me from a person on the edge to a person ready to start. "Yes, I'm ready," I said. He walked forward and I followed. He led me toward one of the balloons.

"Do you know what this is?" he asked.

"It looks like a hot air balloon," I answered.

"It's similar," he told me, "but it doesn't operate the same way. It's powered by a thought engine."

"How does it work?" I asked.

“Each camper gets to ride in a balloon,” Branderen said, “but always on their own. A messenger explains first how to ride, and in this case how to rise. You see, the balloon rises and falls depending on the rider’s thoughts.”

“It does? That’s amazing!” I said. “Tell me more.”

“Listen,” he told me, for now another messenger was approaching with a young man. They stepped into the basket, and the messenger pointed to a white envelope. “Open it,” he said, and the young man obeyed, pulling out a folded sheet of paper. “Read it,” the messenger instructed. This is what the young man read.

“To the rider: mark well these words. For when your thoughts are high and untroubled, your direction will be toward the sky. But when your thoughts are sad and hurt, the balloon will drop, for it rises and falls with the winds blowing through your mind.”

“Do you see the clearing up there on the ridge?” the messenger asked the young man.

The young man looked up. High above, the clearing shone in the morning sunshine. “Your goal is to land the balloon there. Are you ready?” For the first time I looked in the young man’s eyes, and I could see he wasn’t. I began to understand that the purpose of the camp was to take people away for awhile from the stresses of their usual existence, and train them to go home with new understanding. I turned to Branderen. “Who designed this?” I asked.

“The Designer did,” he answered. “This is all the work of the Designer.”

Branderen and I walked from balloon to balloon while one by one the campers came and received their instructions. The messengers didn’t always use the same words, but the words in the envelope were always the same - “...it rises and falls with the winds blowing through your mind.”

“Do the balloons go up and down fast?” I asked.

“That depends,” Branderen said. “They can, but they tend not to change direction all that quickly. It’s a lot like a hot air balloon. If the basket is dropping, turning on the burner will slow its rate of descent, but it won’t turn it around immediately. There’s momentum to be considered.”

“You mean if a person is thinking in a downward direction, they won’t turn around just by thinking one quick, uplifting thought?”

“That’s right,” Branderen said. “To continue in the upward direction requires consistent right thinking.”

“What kind of thoughts make the balloon go down,” I asked.

“Anything that has a negative slant to it,” he said. “Imagine for a moment that you are in a balloon five hundred feet high. Suppose every second we check your thoughts to see whether they are basically “upward-looking” or “downward-aware.” If during that one second your thoughts are strong and bright, your altitude rises by one inch. On the other hand, if your thoughts are associated with any negative outcomes, fears, or worries, then your altitude drops by one inch. Can you imagine yourself in a situation like that?”

“I can imagine it,” I said, “but I don’t know if I like it. Suddenly I would be accountable for every second of my thinking, and I’d be traveling up and down on the basis of it.”

“You notice we still haven’t brought in the momentum factor yet,” Branderen continued. “Suppose you had a bad few seconds, and you began picking up speed in the downward direction?”

“I suppose you would need to think several seconds in a row of bright, whole thoughts,” I said, “just to get back to where the balloon was neither falling nor rising.”

“You’re catching on,” Branderen complimented me. “Now you see why this event was designed. It encourages the rider to think long stretches of higher altitude thoughts.”

Branderen and I walked across the open grass to where the ground rose sharply. “Are we climbing up to the ridge?” I asked. It seemed a long way to me.

“We’re climbing,” Branderen said. “It’s enough to know our pathway is up. Don’t worry at this moment how far we have to go.”

So began the climb, and I soon saw that Branderen was right. When I thought only of where I wanted to go, the way was long and wearisome. But when my attention was diverted to things at hand, climbing was easy. There was actually a lot to see, and we stopped often to look around. Branderen explained about certain trees and plants, never too much, but enough to get me interested. I began to suspect he knew a lot more than he was telling me, but that he also knew my limits, and taught me just enough to keep me coming back for more.

We rested occasionally, especially when the path wound through orchards or berry patches (the fruit that grew on the hillside was very good), but I noticed that even our rests seemed somehow timed, as though we were following some kind of rhythm. There was no sense of urgency or pushing ahead. Still, we made progress, and the progress felt good.

All the while we climbed, balloons were rising and falling in the open air above us. “Will they get there before we do?” I asked. I figured they probably would.

“Some of them will,” Branderen said, “but most will still be in the air when we arrive.” This surprised me since we still had quite a ways to go.

“I would have guessed they would all get there pretty quickly,” I told him.

“Wait till you get there,” he said. “When you talk to them, you’ll understand more.”

The view of the island and the bay grew more and more majestic as time went by. I found my mind was “unwinding,” if that’s the right word. With Branderen setting the pace, I didn’t have to think very hard about the path, or the food, or the rests along the way. It was like we were “flowing” upward across the face of the mountain, and as we climbed, a certain inner part of me grew more and more rested.

When at last we reached the clearing on the ridge, the sun was shining a late afternoon smile across the land, the bay, and the island. Branderen said I was free to follow my heart, so I sat by the edge, drinking in the wonder of the atmosphere and the view. After a while I began talking with some of the campers whose flights had landed already. There was a small group sitting in a circle on the ground, and I joined them, explaining that I had been sent to write my observations of the island, and asking if they would mind sharing their experiences in the balloons.

“It was interesting,” one man said. “I was ready for anything when I started, sort of a mix of interest and confidence, I guess, and at first things went along just fine. I was climbing quickly, and I was enjoying it too. Then I started thinking about other people, people back home, and at work. I wished they could be there and experience the same thing, and I wondered what they would think if they could see me now. Then I noticed something interesting. My opinions about people began affecting the balloon. When I called to mind someone I respect and admire, I sensed an upward pull. But when I pictured someone I don’t feel at ease with, the balloon seemed to grow heavier or something. It just didn’t flow with the same freedom as before. This intrigued me so much that I forgot trying to get up to the ridge and began experimenting to see what effect different people had on the balloon when I thought about them.”

The others laughed. I gathered they had all tried something similar, though perhaps in different ways.

“I found,” one man said, “that my balloon wasn’t rising very fast, but it gave me a great chance to look around, and when I got up high enough to see out over the trees, a wave of happiness went through me. It kind of made all the things I was worried about before I came here seem small and insignificant. At that moment I sort of let go all the bad feelings I’ve had about one person in particular. It seemed like unnecessary baggage. I guess I began to forgive the person. And as soon as that happened the balloon took off. It was really exciting, but then I began to worry that it was rising too quickly, and I looked over the edge and imagined how awful it would be to fall from such a height, and before I knew it the balloon started dropping fast. I went almost all the way back to the ground before I managed to turn it around again.”

“I couldn’t get mine to take off,” a young woman said. “First of all, I didn’t believe there was such a thing as a thought engine, and I told my messenger so. He said that was my

choice, but that I should stay in the basket anyway and watch the others. When I saw them taking off, I thought it was a trick or something. I refused to change my point of view. So I sat there for quite a long time, and I thought maybe I was the only one who had been handed a bum balloon. When almost everyone else was in the air, I began to feel a little lonely, sort of left behind. I kept looking at my balloon wondering where the real mechanism was that made it fly. It wasn't until I started to wonder if the problem was in me, and not in the balloon, that I began to make any progress."

"It's funny," the first man said. "I thought my attitudes and opinions didn't really affect anything. I'm beginning to wonder if it's just the opposite. Maybe my point of view affects everything."

The others nodded. I slipped away to look out over the island and the bay. Balloons were still in the air, dancing up and down. I watched and wondered. I had only been on the island a short time, but I had a lot to consider already.

Day Two

The second day was very different from the first. I didn't realize it immediately, but in time I began to understand that no two days on the island were ever the same. On this morning I set off in a new direction and before long came to what appeared to be the main street of a town. The odd thing was there were no side streets, or perhaps I should say no continuing side streets, for there were intersections on the main street. But these intersections, though they looked real, were just an effect. The side streets ended almost as soon as they began.

"This is Main Street," Branderen told me when I found him a few minutes later.

"It's very interesting," I said. "Parks and buildings and houses and signs. It looks almost real. What's the challenge this time?"

"Listen," Branderen said. One of the campers was standing near the end of the street talking to one of the messengers.

"Your goal today," the messenger said, "is to walk straight down Main Street with joy. Don't turn to the side. Don't look back. Just walk as straight as you can all the way to the other end of the street."

It sounded kind of easy to me, and no doubt Branderen read my thoughts, for he motioned me to follow him around the back of one of the nearby buildings. "Come," he said. "I want you to take a look at the opposition."

This was not what I had expected to hear at all. We made our way around the back, and there was an unwelcome crowd if ever I saw one. I couldn't understand why they were even on the island. They seemed to represent the opposite of everything good.

“That’s why they’re called the opposition,” Branderen said. I just looked at him. Again he had read my thoughts. “That’s the leader of the gang. He’s called the Bully.”

Branderen and I edged our way closer to the group. I didn’t actually want to, but it was the only way to hear what the Bully was saying.

“Remember to stay hidden. We cannot go out in the open and impede their progress, but we can whisper things and shout things and cause any amount of commotion on the sides. It’s important to get the camper’s attention any way you can. Suggestions, thoughts, concepts, and always lies, lies, lies.”

“This is really ugly,” I said. “They’re going to try to ruin each camper’s walk along Main Street by fighting them in the realm of the mind.”

“That’s right,” Branderen said.

The Bully was still talking. “Study each camper. Some will respond by gradually getting angry, and they will turn and face us. Some will want to cross the street to get away. Then those on the other side will have to take over. But either way that’s progress for us. Do anything you can to keep them from walking straight down Main Street with joy.”

Branderen and I walked back around to the front side where the campers were arriving and the messengers were giving instructions. “If they only knew,” I thought, “what was waiting behind these buildings, they wouldn’t look so confident and relaxed.”

“Confident and relaxed,” Branderen said. “Remember that phrase.”

“How do you...?” I stopped.

“Thoughts have wings,” he said. “Come.”

We walked down the street. The sun was bright, and the sky unclouded. Apparently the gang members hadn’t arrived at their places yet, for nothing interrupted the beauty or the happiness of the morning. We stopped in a park about halfway down and sat on a bench where we could watch.

“What was the phrase you wanted me to remember?” I asked.

“Confident and relaxed,” Branderen said. “The gang will try anything to destroy each camper’s sense of confidence and peace. The campers that are able to stay both confident and relaxed will do quite well.”

So we watched from there as one by one the campers started down the street. Most of them began fine, but it wasn’t long before the work of the gang members became evident. The strange part was that I couldn’t see or hear the opposition. All I could see was the effect they had on the campers as they walked. These effects were many and varied. A

few campers kept glancing to the side, and crossing the street as though they were trying to get away from something. Some looked hurt or confused. One man was talking out loud, but to whom I didn't know. A few stopped altogether and broke down and cried. The whole picture became sad for me, because the sun was still bright and the sky still clear. It was such a beautiful day for a walk. Yet for most the enjoyment had been taken away. I asked some of the campers about it when they paused to rest in the park.

“No one told me it would be like that,” one said. “Those voices. They kept accusing me of things. And every time I thought of an answer, they just switched and began accusing me of something else.”

“They kept reminding me of things from my past,” one lady said. “I told them to shut up, but when they realized it was a sore spot with me, they kept on unmercifully.”

“It made me afraid,” a teenage girl said. “I didn't want to be afraid, but they were telling me something really bad would happen if I stayed at the camp.”

“Look,” said Branderen, and he pointed down the street to where one of the messengers was walking straight and tall along the sidewalk.

“Now there's someone who's having an easier time of it,” I thought, and we all stopped talking to watch. I guessed that the gang members had let him alone, but I was wrong. When he passed the park I could hear them cursing and shouting from the building across the street. Even from where I was sitting, it was an awful sound. But the messenger seemed unmoved by it all. He quietly proceeded on his way as though he hadn't even heard.

I turned to Branderen. “Is there a secret?” I asked. “Why is he so impervious to all their assaults?”

“He only responds to the truth,” Branderen replied. “He knows the truth, and the truth makes him free.”

“Then he's dead to all the rest,” I said. “Is that why he doesn't respond? Because he's dead to all those things they're shouting?”

“He's dead to that, and alive to something else,” Branderen said.

The effect this had on the others was interesting. It's easy to talk about how hard things are when no one is succeeding, but as soon as someone tackles the challenge right in front of your eyes, it changes how you look at the situation.

“I'm going back for another try,” said one, and he seemed to have spoken for more than just himself, for several went with him.

It would be nice to say that after that all was well on Main Street, and no one had any more difficulty, but the actual story continued much as it had started. As the day went on, though, we began to see some of the campers making progress.

“It isn’t easy,” I said, after awhile, to Branderen.

“It’s as hard as we make it,” he answered. “The problem the campers are facing is not so much what they hear, but how they respond to what they hear.”

“But the responses are so automatic,” I said. “They arrive here with all those responses built in. In fact, the responses might not have surfaced at all if the Bully and the gang were not around to force the issue.”

“That’s true,” Branderen said, “but what would you rather have? A challenge that went away, leaving you the same, or a challenge that stayed right there until you went away different?”

I didn’t really know how to answer. Perhaps it’s a good thing some questions don’t have to be answered immediately. One thing’s for sure: the challenge the campers were facing stayed there all day. The campers themselves took rests, but the opposition never let up as long as anyone was on the course. Every so often another messenger would walk down the street with joy, sometimes laughing (one went by singing), but always with that sweet confidence that comes to those who are looking only at the truth. At one point curiosity got the better of me, and I almost entertained the idea of trying it out myself. “Don’t,” Branderen told me. “Perhaps someday you’ll come to the island as a camper, but this time you were sent here to write. Stay with the challenge that belongs to you.”

Day Three

I found leaving the cabin each morning was an adventure, for I never knew what to expect. This time I didn’t have to make any decisions though; Branderen was coming across the field. “Today we’re going into the cave,” he said. “You’ll find this is a fun day.”

“Cave?” I asked. “I didn’t know there were any caves.”

“There are many things here not seen at first,” Branderen told me. He led the way into the woods and around a craggy, rocky place to a spot where vines grew thickly on the side of a high hill. It didn’t look like anything, but Branderen pulled aside the vines to reveal an opening large enough to walk into it. The cave was not at all what I expected. It was more like a lighted hallway into the side of the hill, and after a little ways it widened out into a majestic Cavern! I stopped and stood there, taking in the big picture.

Branderen waited just a moment before he asked, “Do you see those vehicles over there?”

“Yes, they look like bumper cars,” I said.

“That’s just about what they are,” he answered, “but we call them vision cars here.”

“Vision cars?”

“They don’t have steering wheels,” he said. “They pick up speed in whatever direction you’re looking.”

The campers had gotten there before I did and were receiving last minute instructions. Soon they each jumped into one of the cars, and the games began.

“This is part one,” Branderen told me. “It’s meant to be a lot of fun. After the Main Street challenge the campers need something on the lighter side. You notice there’s no sign of either the Bully or the gang.”

The games were fun to watch, and I assume it was even more fun to participate. Sometimes there were races, other times team competitions, and no one was bored, for every few minutes a new twist was thrown in. The steering mechanism took a little getting used to, since it responded not only to head motions, but also to eye movements as well. Many a racer was thrown off course by turning to look at someone else. Laughter was everywhere, bouncing off the walls of the Cavern, and the messengers watching from the front were laughing too.

This lasted until lunch, which was served right there in the cave (though where it had been prepared I never did find out). But it was after lunch the really interesting thing happened. One of the messengers stood up to speak.

“This afternoon your challenge is different,” he began. “Instead of riding these bumper cars, you’ll each find an all terrain vehicle waiting for you at the entrance to the cave. You will then be handed an envelope with a list of places on the island. Your goal is to travel to each location and collect flags from the messengers who will be waiting there. The all terrain vehicles are programmed not to go where you’re looking with your outer eyes, but to go where you’re looking with your inner eyes. Whatever you’re holding in your mind at the time, that’s where the vehicle will begin to take you.”

I looked at Branderen. It was beginning to make sense. He just looked at me and nodded.

The afternoon was a beautiful one for me - no rushing, and not too much to keep me busy. I watched for awhile, but as soon as the campers started it became clear that their chief hurdle was keeping just one thing in mind at a time. Those who had the ability to stay focused found it almost as relaxing an afternoon as I did. Those whose minds jumped from one thing to another did a lot of traveling back and forth, but didn’t cover much distance. The vehicles were gentle in that they didn’t stop on a dime, but they were also very faithful to their purpose. What the camper had in mind determined the goal, and the vehicles were designed to process only one goal at a time.

“This is a very interesting design,” I told Branderen later that day. “It can be explained in just a few sentences - nothing complicated about it. But it zeroes in on exactly one thing, and on that one point it never varies.”

“Yes, you’re right,” Branderen replied. “The keys that unlock each situation are sometimes small, but you do have to hold on to the key.”

Day Four

Day four found me walking through the Meadow of High Promise, only this time I walked right on past. Don’t ask me why. Some things about the island just seemed natural, and I followed without questioning. It was a little way past the meadow and over a small footbridge that I found Branderen sitting on a rock.

“Were you waiting for me?” I asked.

He smiled. “I knew you’d be coming,” he said. “Follow me.”

He turned off the main trail, up through the woods a little, and out onto a green clearing with an interesting group of - I guess I should call them cable cars - at least, that’s what I was reminded of when I saw them (though I never saw a whole collection of them side by side). The cables ran in parallel right up the face of the mountain. I wondered if it was a kind of race.

“It isn’t a competition,” Branderen said. “This is the Avenue of Stillness.”

Having been on the island now for a few days, I began to guess a little more quickly what was coming. “You mean the cable cars ride up when the passengers make no noise? I asked.

Branderen looked at me. “You’re close,” he said, “but it’s more than just a question of silence. Silence is good, but stillness is better.”

I thought about it for awhile, and it began to make sense. Silence could be merely external, whereas the stillness Branderen was referring to was probably an inner quality.

As the campers arrived, Branderen and I began our ascent, but the view of the cars remained clear, and I kept looking back while we climbed to see how the campers were doing. For a long time none of the cars moved, and I wondered when the experiment was scheduled to begin.

“They’ve already started,” Branderen told me. “Quite a while ago.”

“They have?” I asked. “Why hasn’t anybody moved?”

“It’s the Avenue of Stillness,” he reminded me.

I pondered that name again while we climbed. I began to wonder what kind of stillness was required.

“It’s a deep stillness,” Branderen commented, “untroubled, unrushed, free.”

“I have to confess,” I said, “that some of these ideas are much deeper than I thought when I arrived here on this island.”

“The thoughts are as deep as life,” Branderen said, “and life is unlimited.”

We climbed awhile in silence. “This island is one of the wildest places I’ve ever been,” I finally said. “The things I’ve seen here are so different than where I come from.”

“It appears that way,” Branderen answered, “but it isn’t really. The things that are true here are true there also.”

“You mean this island is everywhere?” I asked.

“No, not the island,” and he laughed. “But the truth is. And the more you recognize the truth, the more you find it everywhere you look.”

I glanced back at the cars, now far below. A few were beginning to move, but not very fast and not very far. Suddenly one of the cars on the nearer side of the line began to move quite freely. It picked up speed, as though intent on a purpose, and it fairly sailed up the side of the mountain.

“Look at that one go,” I said. It passed by, and we could see into the compartment. Branderen waved. It was one of the messengers.

“He makes it look easy,” I said.

“It is,” Branderen told me, and he looked out across the valley.

“Have you ever tried it?” I asked.

“No, not this event,” he answered.

“This week you haven’t done any of the events,” I observed.

“This week my assignment is to help you.”

I stopped climbing to look at him. “But how did you know?”

“The one who sent you also sent me.”

I looked at the scenery spread out below: the green clearing, the woods, the Meadow of High Promise, and the blue water in the distance. Most of the cable cars had started moving now. Branderen waited quietly.

“I guess we better be moving on,” I said. I didn’t know what else to say.

From that point on we climbed, mostly in silence, until we reached the top, sitting down where we could watch the cable cars arrive. There was food waiting for the campers on wooden tables by the trees. Branderen and I were invited to partake, and we did, but the thoughts flowing through my mind were a kind of food also, and both together made a very good meal.

Day Five

I awoke on the fifth day feeling strong and whole, or at least stronger and more whole than I remembered feeling in the past. I wondered what this day would bring. I knew it was probably the last full day at camp. I stepped out into the morning to find an envelope on my cabin door. “Today is the campers’ day to review,” the note inside read. “Perhaps you’ll want to do the same. You’re on your own.”

I have to say this is the day that went by the fastest of all. I visited all the places again: the Meadow of High Promise, Main Street, the Cavern, the Avenue of Stillness. I watched and talked with campers, but mostly I listened to their stories, asked them what they had felt, and what they had learned. At first I wanted to write down all they told me, but I soon realized there was no way to tell it all, that each camper’s story was his or hers to tell, and that my story wasn’t intended to include all that belonged to them.

In the later afternoon I visited all the places one last time, but this time I didn’t ask any questions or start any conversations. I just wanted to see and feel the drama and the hope. When at last the sun was setting, I made my way back to the little cabin that had become my home for this unusual week. I felt the same peace as when I first arrived, only now it was stronger, and mixed with a lot more wonder.

I straightened up the cabin, swept off the outside walk, and packed my belongings, pulling the bags out of the closet so they would be ready to go. I’m not sure why I did all this the night before - it just seemed like the right thing to do.

Back To The Canoe

When morning came I was up early enough to see the meadow outside my window covered by a thick mist. I dressed, ate breakfast, washed the dishes and put them away. My bags were ready and so was I. With one last look around the room, I shouldered my belongings and headed for the door. Outside the mist was as thick as before.

I might not have been able to find my way through the mist, but I knew in which direction to begin at least, and before I had gone far Branderen showed up, took one of

my bags, and started off into the woods. We climbed just a little ways, but then the path began going downhill, and the further we went, the less dense the mist became, till at last we emerged from under the shade of the trees into the bright scenery of the shoreline, and sunshine was on the water.

My canoe was there, safe and sound, just like I left it. Branderen helped me carry it to the water's edge, and I shook his hand good-bye. "Thank you," I told him. "It's meant more than I can say."

He smiled, and asked if I had any last questions.

"I was wondering about the mist," I said.

"The inner island will be covered in mist all day," he explained, "so the new events may be assembled and tested."

"Do you mean the events are changed every week?" I asked.

"The Designer's plans are always new," he answered. "No two days are ever the same."

I looked at him one last time, this friend of few words, but whose words meant so much. "Thank you," I said again. "I'll always remember."

I pushed off into the bay, and waved one last time to Branderen. I can still see him standing there on the sand, watching until my canoe was far out into the water, heading toward my destination downstream, where a friend had agreed to meet me and drive me home.

Behind Branderen the island was still covered in the same deep mist, but out on the bay the sun reflected off the deep blue of the water, and shone on every wind-tossed wave. My canoe and belongings all looked the same as before, but I knew there were changes in me that weren't visible yet on the outside... in time, perhaps. A sense of peace and wonder seemed to travel with me. Maybe they all feel that way who spend a week on The Isle Of Bright Hope.

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