

Meeting Walnut

Chilled air brushed my face and the backs of my hands while the sun warmed me. Shadows played across the landscape shifting to and fro as Earth rotated around Sun and breezes danced through the limbs and leaves of the trees. Rocks crunching under my feet and grinding against one another are the only sounds I heard at first. I moved down a small, but treacherous hill, where heavy amounts of small white rock have been poured as a path leading to the trail. I came to a choice. Do I follow the path around the rim of the old query in our community or do I follow the path that travels down through the query? The rim called to me. Walking along this path I questioned my decision to leave my camera behind in the car. Some areas within the old strip-pit hold sparkling water. Today the water was crystal clear and created a beautiful vision from atop the rim. Ah, what an amazing photographic opportunity. I must soon return with camera in hand and a hope in my heart to discover another clear day to photograph such a beautiful scene.

Looking down upon the query floor I take notice of how it is filling with new growth. Cattails, small fir trees, grasses, and other various shrubs and trees have pushed forth through the rough rock floor and walls to reach skyward. Holding hands some stand in small groups while others stand alone. A snakelike path winds its way through the bottom of the query slithering from one side to the other. Though this path was created by DePauw University staff when the university took ownership of and preserved this area and turned it into the DePauw Nature Park it smoothly blends into the landscape as though it has always belonged there. Again my eyes travel to the water. I recall a day last summer when my husband and I took our then three-year-old along

the shorter path into the bottom and ventured onto the rocky shore of the water. Our young son experienced great joy in selecting just the right small stone and tossing it into the water. The plunk of the water accepting the weight of the stone, the explosion of water drops leaping into the air and the ripples drifting out getting bigger and bigger enthralled him.

Moving on around the rim I came to another choice in paths. Without hesitation I chose the trail that led away from the query and into the shadowy woods. Crickets continually played a sweet tune, but I began to notice that all of the woodland animals were keeping hidden from view. Perhaps, the vibration of my footsteps kept them away. Occasionally, I would hear what seemed to be a scamper in the brush, but my eyes were unable to spy evidence of such. As more branches in the paths appeared I continued to choose the path that would carry me deeper into the lushness of nature knowing eventually these trails would wrap around until they were nestled into the forest floor next to the creek. The path itself shifting from gravel, to grass, to a bed of fallen leaves, to sand led me up and down hills and around curves within the belly of the woods.

Suddenly, I stopped in my tracks. I heard a sound I was unaccustomed to. I waited, quietly. I heard it again and then caught a glimpse of a huge and magnificent blue bird. So rarely encountering Blue Heron, I had honestly forgotten he lives here. I thought perhaps his call and his quick flight were related to my approach, but as I moved onward I acknowledged it was probably due to a man and woman ahead of me. They had two large dogs – a golden retriever and a white shepherd. Water glistened as it slid down their fur and dripped back into the creek. The dogs romped and splashed as

they played in the creek's edge. Blue Heron was apparently displeased with their arrival and behavior. Further, down the path I encountered Blue Heron again as he or another screeched at the dogs arrival – I had stopped a ways back and the couple and their dogs had passed me on the path.

Moving through the woods I was fascinated at the change in the woodland societies. Frog, Cricket, Fish, and Turkey Vulture shared the query bed while Blue Heron, Dragon Fly, White-tailed Deer, and a vast amount of birds shared the creek. One section of the creek felt like a bird sanctuary. Counting the variety of birds and their songs was impossible for me. Thunk, thunk, thunk. Red-headed woodpecker pounded on a tree. Female Goldfinch landed on a branch within five feet of me. I stopped to enjoy her, “Hi beauty!” She tilted her head, lifted off and moved to another branch just a few feet further down the path. The air was filled with movements of birds here and there, low and high. Cardinal flew across my path twittering as he landed.

As I turned from the creek with its low, but swiftly moving water, and the miniature waterfall created by a large branch and rocks I headed back toward the deeper woods. A huge dark shadow came out of nowhere and covered Caterpillar as she was bravely taking on the journey of crossing the gravel path. I was able to stop my foot in time. I stopped, crouched down and spoke gently to her. She paused only momentarily before pumping her tiny legs as fast as they could go to move up and down the tiny hills and valleys of the path. Sadly, I then noticed another caterpillar that apparently, I had not missed hitting with my sneaker. My heart reached out to him as he writhed on the gravel. Unable to continue on he flipped and flopped where he was. I apologized from

deep within my heart. I know that not all will survive – not all of us and not all caterpillars, but my heart still constricted with his pain. Upon seeing the first caterpillar make it across the path to the grass beyond I took my leave.

Then, I met Walnut. Feeling badly about critically wounding the caterpillar behind me I had my eyes cast downward, but I knew I was missing out on so much beauty around me. As my gaze shifted upwards again I met Walnut. Left step, right step, left step, left foot roll, ankle twisting – in what seemed like slow motion my left leg was no longer under me and my body pitched forward hands outstretched. Thoughts rushed through my head, but I was unable to prevent my palms grinding into the gravel. With a twist I was able to land on my rear with a thud. I sat there for a moment gazing at my palms inspecting the damage and acknowledging the pain. A bit of peeled skin here and broken skin there left my palms burning. I sat there with a laugh in my heart and a smile on my face for I had met Walnut. I am unsure of the message, but it seems I was not giving Walnut enough attention. I was too busy admiring the birds, the water, the caterpillars and dragonflies. Walnut reminded me, none too gently, to take note of All.

This long adventure today brought me pleasure and pain. It reminded me of the emotional and spiritual healing nature has to offer. And, it left its mark on my palms and bum so as not to forget how important it All is – how important we ALL are. Today, I met Walnut anew.