

Building A Man

Donald Lewis

The year 1930 found America gasping under the stifling folds of the greatest depression it had ever known. Soup and bread lines crisscrossed the stricken nation as the standard of living plunged ever downward. Tenant farmers in southern Indiana, unable to stock their larders fully during prosperity, found that life had well nigh become unbearable. Tillers of yellow, lime-free, and eroded acres, these men were forced to share half of their meager produce with their landowners. In order to survive they existed on a deficiency-cursed diet of navy beans and corn bread. Their children walked miles over muddy roads to stove-heated and unlighted one-room school houses. The boys wore patched overalls, usually the only pair in their possession, while the girls wore thin cotton dresses and covered their undernourished bottoms with a course bleached material which still bore traces of the checkerboard legend with which the feed sacks had originally been marked. These children, their pinched faces and thin bodies, were symbolic of the hopelessness of the era. An unbalanced diet and inadequate clothing made them an easy prey for the sickness and death which lowered attendance at the tiny school rooms and thinned their pitiful ranks.

In August of this unhappy year I was born to one of these Indiana families, and the occasion could not have been joyous, for where there had been three mouths to feed there were now four. My only brother, who was six years older than I, was a cruel and blundering but well-meaning lout who turned my early childhood into a nightmare. The possession of a loud voice and ready fists had given him an early domination over his schoolmates, and he set out immediately upon my birth to number me among his subdued followers. I rebelled against his many orders, and when he forced me to obey his commands, I developed a bitter hate for him. Since I could not cope with him either physically or mentally, my defense was to draw within myself. The fact that we lived in a backwoods sector with few neighbors also helped bring about my inner withdrawal. Accompanied by my two dogs, a pair of fox terriers named Rock and Rye, I avoided people as much as possible by spending long hours wandering over the fields. Society held no charm for me.

In 1942 when my brother went to war, I witnessed his departure dry-eyed and secretly hopeful that the Japs would

roast him on a spit, but even his physical departure did not permit me to escape from the shadow which he had held over me for twelve years. The same flair for the brutally dramatic which had characterized him all of his life led him to volunteer for the Submarine Service. He immediately became a hero in the eyes of my mother and father, and their apparent concern over his welfare kept me constantly aware of the shadow of the brother whom I hated with a "Cain toward Abel" fervor. I entered high school still cursed with the acute inferiority complex which he had given me.

In 1947 he came home from the war, and I reflected bitterly that fate had not accommodated me by letting him get killed. The next day, at my suggestion, we donned the boxing gloves which he had sent me one Christmas from San Francisco and squared off in the front yard. I moved in eagerly, for I had long awaited this — an hour which I had trained for by boxing in high school with a savage determination that had enabled me to win the school championship while still a sophomore. He stabbed through my guard with a straight left and followed with a solid right to the jaw. As I lay on the grass and saw him standing above me with that same infuriating grin on his face, I felt a black wave of miserable despair engulf me. Desperation drove me to my feet, and I swarmed over him in a fury of blows which caught him by surprise. Recovering from the unexpected, he fought back confidently, but now superior boxing skill was paying off, and I poured lefts and rights into his body. At last these punishing blows began to take their toll, and as he lowered his guard I shifted the attack to his face. Each time I landed and felt the solid shock travel from my wrist to the shoulder, a glow of satisfaction swept over me. He was bleeding badly about the face; and when I suddenly switched to the body once more with a right hook to the belt, he fell heavily but rose at once. His guard came down to protect his midsection, and I poured lefts and rights into that crimson mask which had been his face; but he still grinned that same old self-confident grin — a bloody grin, to be sure, and from split lips, but still recognizable.

Suddenly a grudging admiration came over me as I realized that his strength had always been in this ability of his to take life with a grin and that the riding which he had always given me was his clumsy way of trying to build a man. I let my arms drop, and it was obvious that my blows had been holding him up, for he sagged heavily against the fence, and the blood from his face dripped against the fence post and cut crimson trails down its white cylinder. He grinned through

his slashed and puffed lips and stuck out a trembling hand. I felt a million hours of misunderstanding, hate, and inferiority leave me as I shook it heartily.

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Canadian Wilderness

Conrad Dee Brown

As the slow train drew nearer to our destination of Anjigami, we began gathering our amateurish assortment of camping gear and fishing equipment. As we peered out the window into the vast forests of Canada, we knew nothing of our future that was to bring us sore backs, shoulders, and feet, and also a world of experience mingled with pleasure and work. About this time the conductor came swaying down the aisle calling, "Anjigami, Mile 148". Finally the train came to a jolting halt in front of a little sixteen-by-sixteen log hut. With a gasp we all said at once, "So this is Anjigami". We had expected at least a small settlement. About the time we were recovering from shock, we saw a true native of the region in a wagon which was drawn by a single horse. He introduced himself as Mr. Couto, our guide for next two weeks. He gave us brief orders to put our duffel into the wagon and follow him to the beach.

Here we caught sight of Lake Anjigami. It was seven and a half miles long and completely enveloped by birch trees and several thousand pines and cedars scattered around. The lake was shaped like a kidney, and Mr. Couto told us we would go to the west end of the lake for our first portage of two hundred yards. After an hour and a half of riding over rough water we came to our first portage and cleared it in an amateur fashion to Half-mile lake. We repeated our procedure to the next portage which was of equal distance, and after crossing Mile lake we came to the next portage, which was one-half mile in length. Burdened with food, clothing, outboard motor, and six hundred succulent worms, we came out of the bush to a boat landing of Pickeral lake.

This was it! After a two-and-a-half mile ride over water, we finally caught sight of our cabin. After a quick survey we questioned our guide as to how far it was to the nearest town. Mr. Couto said the first neighbor was fourteen miles away, and we were one hundred and sixty miles from the