

## Academic Forum 24 2006-07

How majestic and powerful he was... Harassed and yet, he never moved a talon, though he could have... The more powerful of the two (2) participants did not move...

I knew there were owls “out at the pond”... had found evidence of their living there... Had come to love the sound of their call late into the evening...

So, I sat and pondered... and was moved to tears by his presence and the scene I had witnessed...

So powerful, majestic and yet choosing not to defend himself...

Was there a deeper lesson at work here?

What is the lesson of “The Owl and the Mockingbird”?

Always the contemplative, I wondered if the wisdom of the owl’s visit could be applied to the issue(s) of knowledge, power and wisdom. ...the very ones that I was wrestling at that exact moment...

Dr. VZ (former doctoral level mentor from the U of A) had a way of saying, “Knowledge without the wisdom to use it; is like a dull ax; fitter to bruise than to heal.”

One of my devotional calendars of the week spoke of “Never expecting justice; and yet never ceasing to offer it to others... Never expecting, but offering...”

I wondered if the Owl knew anything about knowledge and wisdom... justice and mercy... or how graceful he was and how gracefully he behaved...

I wonder if that is why the symbol for justice in our country is blind... yet weighing the evidence in the balance that she holds...

There is power and then there is real power...

My friend and medical director, Dr. Michael C. Young at Prescott Family Clinic, has a way of saying “The wheel of the Gods grinds infinitely slow, but infinitely fine”...

There a great professorial pun circulating of late... “Old age and treachery will overcome youth and enthusiasm every time”...

But G. H. Owl did not stoop to treachery; he did, in fact, not respond at all...

As I have been permitted for many years to watch the birth and development of professionals, in general; and counselors, in particular; there comes a point of self-discovery

where we realize, “No matter how folks treat us, we cannot or will not choose to hurt them in return”.

What a wonderful thing to discover about yourself... Profound... absolutely profound...

It was happening to me... Right there... that spring afternoon at the crosspoints between how to wield power and yet use wisdom, mercy and even grace...

It is my belief that our friend, G. H. Owl could have defended himself and there would have been “bloodshed;” though not his.

He would have been the victor, but at what cost to another life?

More personifications in regard to “ole’ G. H. Owl”...

Maybe he had “fought this fight” before and knew that Mockingbird would tire of his game...

Or maybe he had learned to “pick his battles”...

The wonderful wisdom of a great horned owl, my dog, Sam, and me on a sunny afternoon at the crosspoints (of decision) and property lines at the old farmhouse...

At the crosspoints of knowledge and wisdom, power and mercy and even living and dying with grace...

Within days, I was given the opportunity to “draw my sword” on a colleague or to “show professional wisdom, mercy and grace” toward the same colleague...

I chose the latter...

Thanks to a visit from “The Owl and the Mockingbird” and my ole’ dog, Sam...

I learned a great deal about myself, the wielding of power, showing mercy and even choosing to live life with grace and dignity.

Let us stop looking for wisdom, mercy and grace from others and yet never stop extending it to others...

It’s all “in the preposition”...

“Freedom to... Not freedom from...

Not expecting from, but extending to...

How appropriate...

May we continue to be the “Great Horned Owls” and the “Keepers of Wisdom, Mercy and Grace”; who are not looking for those attributes from others; but who never cease to extend those principles “to the others” in our lives... whether “they” be our students, parents, teachers, administrators or the community at large.

As always,  
Linda~

P. S. Sam, my golden retriever, departed this life on July 26, 2006. He rests in the shadow of the blackthorn near the point of this final incident in our lives together. This story was/is completed in his honor. L~

### Commentary

The original teaching version is quite usable in the classroom, even for private reading. I have students who prefer this version to the shorter, yet possibly more applicable oral presentation version. The oral presentation version has been through the editorial process.

Now for the Oral Presentation version in its entirety...

### “The Owl and the Mockingbird”

A bit distracted by the “political decision” of sorts that I was pondering, I had gone out to feed Sam, my golden retriever. Not in his usual spot on the porch and not laying in the garage, I began to worry that he was sick or injured. With quickening step and heartbeat, I began my search for Sam.

Sam was forty-two (42) years “my senior” in “dog years” and age thirteen (13) in “human years”. We had shared seven (7) summers together at the farmhouse. Once a proud and productive hunter and retriever, now he resigned himself to his partial retirement status of beloved friend, companion and protector, when the need arose.

Sam was beginning to show “some age” with white hairs laced into his muzzle and backcoat, some feebleness in his movements due to arthritis and hip dysplasia, yet his noble heart was quite intact.

I found Sam standing “stately and proud” as in his former days “holding the point” as Daddy would say. I followed Sam’s gaze upward and stopped, my heart quickening in my

chest. A Great Horned Owl in “broad daylight” clutched the lower branch of the blackthorn tree in the fence line between the “front patch” of the pasture and the backyard, where I stood.

I know it was a “Great Horned” because I “looked it up” in the World Book Encyclopedia right after the episode took place.

I went back into the farmhouse to get the binoculars to have a closer look. It was then that I first saw and admired his handsomeness and the patterns in his coloring.

He was several shades of brown on his “face and shoulders;” with shades of grey and brown on his chest... The pattern which the grey, brown and white feathers together gave a rather “mosaic” look to his chest all the way down to his feet, which were covered from the way he was perched upon the branch.

After I called Sam away from the Great Horned, I sat down on a stump to observe him. Sam settled into a shady spot nearby to watch the episode unfold, lest his services be required.

As I seated myself upon the stump with binoculars “in hand,” the Great Horned Owl opened one eye and peered at me. It was “a moment.” There was something ethereal or “other worldly” about him. Just amazing... I was mesmerized by his presence and his beauty...

I felt blessed to receive such a visit and visitor...

Just for a moment, he opened both eyes. He looked directly at me. Then closed them again.

As I continued to admire this magnificent creature, and began to ponder the reason for his visit... a mockingbird flew by and commenced to slam into this dignified fellow. The owl never moved... The pictures in the World Book show their talons and tell about how powerful these birds of prey are. Here was this mockingbird (about 1/10 of his size) flying into him.

I began to think, there’s going to be a killing, right here.” But the Great Horned never moved.

I thought with one flick of this magnificent bird’s talons, this mockingbird would “be toast”...

The owl never moved.

I began to think, if that mockingbird doesn’t stop harassing this handsome and powerful chap, I am going to have to stop him myself.

The enthusiastic, though misguided mockingbird made several more swoops of flying into the Great Horned Owl with a resounding “thud;” which moved the owl’s whole body with the force of impact.

In time the mockingbird tires of his game and flies away... To leave the great horned owl, Sam, and me alone “at the fence line” in the “shadow of the blackthorn tree.”

How majestic and powerful he was... Harassed and yet, he never moved a talon, though he could have... The more powerful of the two (2) participants did not move...

I was moved to tears.

Within days, I was given the choice of “drawing my sword” on a colleague or showing professional wisdom, mercy and grace.

I chose the latter...

Thanks to a visit from “The Owl and the Mockingbird” and my ole’ dog, Sam...

### **Commentary**

At the Arkansas Counselors Conference in November, “The Owl and the Mockingbird” was introduced with the following passage.

One of my favorite mentors, though I have not ever met her, is Dr. Clarissa Pinkola Estes`. For many years, she was an author and cantadora, “keeper of the stories.” As she has matured both professionally and individually, much of the body of her later and most powerful work is available only via spoken word. Dr. Estes` begins each oral presentation with this excerpt:

Dr. Clarissa Pinkola Estes says that “stories are medicine.” Whenever a tale is told, it becomes night. No matter where the dwelling, no matter the time, no matter the season, the telling of tales causes a starry sky and a white moon to creep from the eaves and hover over the heads of the listeners. Sometimes, by the end of the tale, the chamber is filled with daybreak, other times a star shard is left behind, sometimes a ragged thread of storm sky. And whatever is left behind is the bounty to work with, to use toward soul-making, the making of life (P. 504).

“The Owl and the Mockingbird” was inserted here.

Dr. Estes` ends each of her oral presentations with the following story.

This is my paraphrase of Dr. Estes story regarding the great Jewish teacher, “Ben Shem Tov.”

“Ben Shem Tov”

Ben Shem Tov is leaving. In preparing for his departure, he wants to leave his disciples “well equipped” with everything they might need, both in his absence and on their journey without him.

He calls them all together and shares with them once more “where to stand in the forest,” “how to light the fire,” “how to say the prayers,” and “God always came”...

In the first generation, the disciples forgot the place in the forest; but they remembered the fire and the prayers; and God came...

In the second generation, the disciples even forgot the prayers; yet God came...

By the third generation, the disciples had forgotten the sacred place in the forest and the holy prayers; yet one of the disciples remembered “the stories”... And “God still came...”

May we always be the “keepers of the stories” that we are... Whether it is the story of an administrator, a teacher, a child or a communities where we serve... As long as we tell their stories, they are always with us...

Revised: October 8, 2006... (le)

## Summary

The past year has been amazing from having my first article published in a refereed journal, to being invited to “read my work” on National Public Radio and invited to present my work at a national conference. I am thankful for the opportunity to chronicle this amazing process.

Secondly, I am fascinated as to when, how and why one form of a work is more appropriate than another form of the same work. As we mature as writers and presenters, do we develop a preference or it is related to the needs and wants of our audience?

One of my favorite quotes attributed to the Public Broadcasting Service (PBS) is their stated purpose “To inform, enlighten and entertain.” Could the answers to my queries be as simple as “writer’s preference,” the appropriateness of the “materials to the audience,” or as complex as “why we enjoy seeing our favorite entertainers in person”?

As I continue to write and seek opportunities to present my work, I will continue to explore the amazing interrelatedness of written story to spoken word.

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## Biography

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