

UP

One Man's Journey to Feminism

Peter W. Pruyn

he / him / his*

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Cover photo: 7,500 feet over Galveston Bay early on a Saturday morning. ©2020 Peter W. Pruyne.

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Content warning:
Contains descriptions of physical and emotional violence

* Pronounced “prine”. He/him/his: This is the set of pronouns I ask others to use when referring to me. People who identify as transgender or gender nonconforming may use pronouns that do not conform to binary male/female gender categorizations, such as “they, them, theirs.”

Epilogue

“All suffering is bearable if it is seen as part of a story.”

— Isak Dinesen

Many Trails

A Native American story
adapted from Bill Miller¹²⁸

There once was a girl who heard the sound of the Whippoorwill for the first time, and she was enchanted. She felt compelled to go see this bird that was singing so beautifully. So the girl set off in the direction of the song, only to discover that Whippoorwill was a lot farther away than she had anticipated because the wind had been carrying the song along. So when the girl came across a well-worn trail across a field, she took it—only to discover Coyote sitting in the middle of it, and Coyote was singing, too. When Coyote heard the girl he turned and said, “What are you doing here?” The girl was frightened and said, “Oh, well, your path was an easy way to get to the other side of this field.”

And Coyote said, “Well, if you’re not following me, then . . . why are you here?”

The girl said, “Oh, I heard the song of Whippoorwill, and I wanted to see him sing.”

“Do you not think *my* songs are beautiful?”, asked Coyote.

The girl replied, “Oh, I like your songs well enough, but I hear you all the time. It was Whippoorwill who I heard for the first time today.”

And Coyote said, “Listen to my new night song; you’re going to like this one,” and he tilted back his head and let out a yodel. Well, the girl covered her ears, and after Coyote had finished she said, “Thank you for the song, but I must be going.”

Coyote called after her, “Hold on there a second, girl! It just so happens I know a shortcut to Whippoorwill, and it’s just over there,” he said pointing with his paw.

The girl looked around. Dusk had already come and gone, and it’s true: she didn’t know the way. So, she decided to follow Coyote. She quickly discovered, however, that Coyote’s trail was a lot rougher and rockier than she had anticipated. Not only that, Coyote kept speeding up until he was practically at a full trot. Coyote yelled over his shoulder, “Hurry up, girl! We’re almost there!”—just as the girl fell in yet another gopher hole.

So the girl picked herself up, brushed off her skinned knee, and finally reached Whippoorwill’s spot—only to discover that Whippoorwill was no longer there. Coyote was no longer there, either; he was now off singing in some other distant field. The night had gone, too, and so as the dawn slowly rose in the east, the girl turned and headed for home with her burrs, bruises, and mosquito bites.

¹²⁸ Bill Miller is a Native American artist and musician. This story is adapted from his album: Miller, Bill, “*Many Trails*,” *The Red Road*, Warner Music, 1993.

It would only be many summers later that this girl would become a much wiser woman. And she would realize: *there are no shortcuts* to finding the thing you really love. But: there are many trails in life, so the best you can do is to be true to your own path—and, always, be on the look-out ... for Coyote.

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