

## WOUNDED WARRIOR

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“In carrying out Christ’s mission to bring all to oneness with the Father, we experience and accept the paschal mystery in our lives.” (YAS, C 5)

In the summer of 2000, this passage took on a profoundly deeper meaning in my life.

I had just begun my annual retreat at the Jesuit Retreat House near Oshkosh, Wisconsin. A violent wind storm had recently devastated dozens of old trees on the property, completely uprooting many of them. Amid the destruction, I searched for my “spiritual companion,” a creature of nature who Native Americans believe is sent as a guide on one’s spiritual journey.

Recently, I had been experiencing a new awareness of many limitations in my life caused by a stroke I suffered in 1996 while missioned on the Turtle Mountain Reservation in North Dakota. The stroke had resulted, not only in my decreased mobility, but also had ended my loved Ojibway (an Indian tribal name) ministry. How appropriate then that my companion guide became a large elm tree fallen along the path outside my window.

The next eight days I spend hours sitting on its trunk, contemplating the meaning of its diminishment and mine I think I can best share the fruit of these musings in a poem that I wrote at the end of my retreat.

## WOUNDED WARRIOR

Still straight and tall,  
Along the path you lie,  
Where once you stood  
In stately pride.

Tell me, friend,  
Were you stricken  
By indifferent blow  
Of woodsman's skill?  
Nay, wounded sorely  
By loving power  
Of my Creator's will.

Ripped from the soil  
That nourished you.  
Stark, gnarled roots  
Bared to view.  
Strong limbs crushed  
By wild winds' fury,  
Green leaves scattered  
Quickly fading.

A songbird lights  
On broken limb  
And softly sings  
Your requiem.

Child of loss,  
Child of storm,  
Rest gently now on earth's warm  
breast.

Dream dreams of  
Future fruitfulness.

Nearby, young saplings rise,  
Lift tender branches  
To the sky, and bring  
Bright promise of  
Another spring.

Meditate the mystery,  
Ponder well your destiny.  
Outward sign—diminishment  
Inward grace—God's sacrament.

Here, on the shore of Lake Winnebago, I learned the truth of another passage from *You Are Sent*: “Fundamentally in prayer we acknowledge, accept, and freely surrender to the reality of who God is and who we are, creatures unconditionally loved by our Creator.” (YAS, C 28)

In surrendering to my limitations, I found freedom and peace. Or, as my native friends so wisely describe it, “In the Native American lifeways, all that is essential to life is carried within you... it is very present in the heart.” (Stan Padilla)