

1975
by L.J. Davis

When I was a little girl, my grandparents lived on a farm. Every Sunday, or so it seemed, my family would travel out to the farm on a winding road. There was nothing out there. Very few houses, a few horses here and there, and a road that seemed to go on for miles.

That's what I loved about it. It was the country and quite different from where I was growing up in suburbia. My Nana and Tata had the great fortune to live on a dairy farm. As we turned right down the road that went straight towards their farmhouse, black and white cows greeted us

on either side. Usually, as soon as the car would stop, I would jump out and run back down that road to see the cows and try to get them to notice me. It seemed that they never did.

My favorite part of the visit, however, was not the cows or the barn or the old deserted houses that littered their large property, it was the waterfall. In back of their house rose a mountain so high that I thought I would reach the sky if I climbed it. A creek started by the farmhouse and, if you followed it, it would meander past the sheds and the tomato garden and the rock alcove where my Nana said the coyotes hunkered down during the night, and it would start to creep up the hill.

When I got out of the car, my thoughts would either be on the cows or that waterfall. But, I wasn't allowed to climb up the hill by myself. The grown-ups let me and my cousins have the run of the place as long as we stayed together. We were allowed to climb parts of the mountain with each other to explore the old Indian bowls that had been carved into the rocks over time. My Nana said that the smooth openings in the rock had been used to grind food like a mortar. I enjoyed exploring and wondering what it would have been like to be an Indian woman perched on a hill making dinner for family, but my mind always crept back to the waterfall.

When there was a good rain, the waterfall ran full and poured down the hill like a rainspout. It made the creek feel clean like it had just been rinsed with fresh water, which, indeed, it had. If you looked down, you could see round pebbles and rocks, free from the dirt that had settled on them before the rain had come. If you were in the farmhouse, instead of hearing the gentle sounds of the creek as the water played over the rocks, you could hear a steady *whoosh* of water that made you want to jump out of your skin.

It didn't matter to me, however, if the creek was full to the brim or trickling steadily through the landscape. It didn't matter if the waterfall *whooshed* or just dripped, I just wanted to see it. But, I wasn't allowed to visit it by myself. Being a solitary individual, my body and soul yearned to climb up that mountain alone; just me and glorious nature. But, I was constantly warned about snakes and traps that could snare my foot and leave me hurt. I was told about poison ivy and rabid animals. I was told to stay away from the waterfall because my parents and grandparents didn't want me to get hurt.

I didn't listen. Whenever I got the chance, after I would pretend to make up an excuse to get away, usually something about needing to get lemons from the lemon tree

out back to make lemonade, I would walk slowly out of the door, get behind the house a little ways, and run! I would run across the flat ground where the garden slept, jump over the little part of the creek, run through the barren ground that lay in between, and start to climb. I would climb on one side of the waterfall and then, when it became too hard, I would cross over to the other side. I would keep climbing and climbing until I reached a section of the mountain where a large expanse of soft green wild grass grew. In the middle of the grass lay three stone boulders, jugged up vertically like someone had laid them against each other. It was my own little Stonehenge. I would lay on the grass, look up at the sky through the trees and wonder if the Indians used this as a spot for play and reflection.

As I lay on the grass taking it all in, time was nonexistent. It was just me - my actions, my words, and my thoughts. I could think about whatever I wanted to think about. I could do whatever I wanted to do. I could dream about whatever I wanted to dream. There was no place like it on Earth. The mountain was a place that was mine and mine alone. Even though I sometimes went up with my brother, sister and cousins, it was my mountain. When I climbed it, it knew who I was. I could sense the trees and the creek and the boulders shouting, "It's her, she's back." When I climbed

that mountain, as I diverted obstacles to rise to my special green hideaway, I was powerful.

Always a shy girl, when I was climbing that mountain, I was not shy or small or insignificant in any way. I was just me and I had never been happier with myself. In climbing that mountain, I had time to reflect like so few children do today. I could reflect on the past, present and future in a way that has shaped me as the adult I am now. I knew, by taking it all in, that I was not the first one to climb that mountain or the last. I knew that people who had lived and loved and died had climbed that mountain to sit where I was sitting and were breathing the air I was breathing. I knew that some girl just like me years and years before had yearned to run up the hill, to explore and uncover the secrets of the waterfall and of herself. I knew that I would grow up, get married, have children, live life, and die. It didn't scare me to think of the future or wonder about the past, it just was.

Climbing that mountain moved my soul and mind to new heights. As I climbed, I awakened a power within my belly that stirs every morning when I get up and silences, somewhat, every night when I go to sleep. It is a drive to move higher and farther, to seek out places when people tell me not to, to take risks, and explore ideas and challenges that people are afraid to. To not accept what is given to me

as fact, but to find my own path and my own reasoning for life's mysteries, miracles, and turmoils. That mountain and its waterfall made me see that life will always go on whether I am there or not and it made me determined to leave some sense of who I was so that one day some other little girl who pushed herself up that mountain, criss-crossed over the stream, and burst upon her secret grassy place would wonder whether some other little girl, like me, had ever imagined how wonderful life could be.