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Jon Remmerde

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## Quiet as the Desert Night

Dad made arrangements with the owners of a ranch in the Owens Valley in California, pulled our trailer out to the end of a dirt road, and set it up so we could live there a while during our wanderings around the western states.

I was ten. I saw the world as an unfolding adventure, full of learning and new experiences. Way out there in the desert, largely stripped of water to supply Los Angeles, my brothers, my sister, and I wandered with a great deal of freedom and discovered newness every day.

Dad worked in a mine in Nevada, stayed there through the week, and came home weekends to our little oasis, a grove of trees, the foundation of a house, the house gone into history, the remaining concrete weathered by years.

Late Friday night, I slept. Because we lived in a trailer, we had limited space and beds. After his long drive home, Dad scooped me up and carried me out to the truck he'd just parked and bedded me down on the truck seat. I liked sleeping out there. I liked not quite waking from sleep, flying toward the truck under brilliant stars in the clear sky in my dad's strong arms, settling in the truck, a place of adventures, to sleep.

Our only electricity came from a small generator with a gasoline-powered motor, placed inside the house foundation, with a long cord carrying electricity into the trailer. That was before modern technology quieted small gasoline motors, and the power plant roared under the trees through the first part of the dark night. I lay closer to the power plant in my temporary bed in the truck, and the truck had less insulation than the trailer, so the roaring motor dominated the night.

If I stayed deeply-enough asleep as Dad gathered me from the bed in the trailer and carried me out to the truck cab, there was no interruption. I slept soundly until morning and didn't remember moving. But I liked to wake enough to be aware of moving, to be

aware of the night, of my dad, warm and smelling like a day's work and a long night's drive.

If I woke that much, then I was alone on the seat of the truck, and the power plant roared in the night. I discovered that I could tune out the roaring sound from the generator motor. The process fascinated me.

I focused my thoughts so they totally excluded the power plant, and I didn't hear the machine. I had to do it without intention. I could not decide not to hear the loud sound and then not hear it. I had to think my way along a path that excluded awareness of the power plant by focusing on other thoughts, by focusing on a way of being that contained no power plant.

I was always startled when I thought again of the power plant, immediately heard it and realized that, for a while, I had not heard it. It was as if thinking of it again started the sound again. Only in retrospect did I realize I had achieved silence while the roar filled the night around me. I slept again.

When Dad shut the generator off for the night, the difference in the night woke me. I listened to the silence and compared it with the moments of silence I had found within the roar of the power plant. The silence accompanied by the natural night, with no lights shining out from the trailer, was deep and dependable. I could think of anything, and the quiet would last. Night surrounded us. The stars and moon shone into the night. The trailer and the car sat visible but silent.

I sat up on the truck seat and watched the night. I saw coyotes playing in our yard. Coyotes left, and I watched deer walk into our small oasis, eat grass growing under our trees, and then walk back into the brushy, sparsely-grassed desert around us.

I began to understand the completeness of the natural world I lived in. I began to understand the complexity of all the life of the world, that continued all the business of living if I woke or if I slept, if I stayed quiet or if I was noisy. Sitting alone in the truck cab, with my sleeping bag pulled up around me, looking out at the quiet night, I began to realize I would see much more of the world around me if I disciplined myself toward quietness within.