

NOLS Wilderness Course 2002

To Stephanie
From Bubba

Thine Eyes Still Shined

Thine eyes still shined for me, though far
I lonely roved the land or sea:
As I behold yon evening star,
Which yet beholds not me.

This morn I climbed the misty hill
And roamed the pastures through;
How danced thy form before my path
Amidst the deep-eyed dew!

When the redbird spread his sable wing,
And showed his side of flame;
When the rosebud ripened to the rose,
In both I read thy name.

Emerson
My Journal to You
April 27th 2001

Still, what I want in my life
is to be willing
to be dazzled --
to cast aside the weight of facts

and maybe even
to float a little
above this difficult world.
I want to believe I am looking

into the white fire of a great
mystery. I want to believe that
the imperfections are nothing --
that the light is everything --
that it is more than the sum
of each flawed blossom rising and
fading. And I do.

Mary Oliver

You are sitting reading this, perhaps in the airport, at the Nobile in Lander, or maybe you have saved it for your first day in the field. You are filled with an odd mix of feelings that are new to you. You feel alone and yet surrounded, excited and yet unsure, trusting and yet fearful. You have the feeling of a first-grader whose mother has just dropped her off for the first day of school and has now walked out of the child's view for the remainder of the day. Don't be afraid; she will come pick you up in time. These are feelings that we all have to become comfortable with so that we can control them rather than letting them control us.

Later you will be more at ease. You will read this all again. Yards away from your tarp-mates, you will perch on an odd-shaped rock, unfold your books and papers, and read listening to the sound of the wind, birds, and your friends preparing dinner yards away.

The following is just some thoughts I want to share. Some of them are learned from mistakes made on my first trip with NOLS. Others are things I changed that worked well for me during the semester in Baja. My prayer is that they speak directly to your spirit, that they resound within you, and strengthen you when you are weak. People will hurt you, the trail will become hard, and your patience will be tested. There will be times when you won't remember ever laughing so hard. Then, in a matter of minutes, you may find yourself in a situation that makes you wonder why you ever decided to on

this course. But remember to "consider it all joy ... when you encounter various trials, knowing that the testing of your faith produces endurance. And let endurance have its perfect result, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing. Blessed is the man who perseveres under trial; for once he has been approved, he will receive the crown of life, which the Lord has promised to those who love Him." James 1.

There are two lists here. The first is somewhat serious. It is a list of "Maxims of a NOLS course." If you take them to heart, they will save you having to learn some hard lessons and maybe allow you to get more out of your trip. The second is just a list of silly tips that may make your day to day life a little easier. Both of these lists should, at least, let you know someone loves you.

[1] **You are alone on a NOLS course. Embrace it.** My first bit of advice is to do your best to not spend the time of this experience wishing you were here or there. Be glad that you are and try to enjoy every moment, no matter how uncomfortable, for what it is -- for what it can teach you. Soon enough, you will be back around people different than the group that you have spent all those days with and you will miss the simplicity of NOL's life, no matter how much you despise some of those people. Take it from me, no matter how bad it seems, just look around and be glad that you are getting to see what few dream about. God Note: Don't forget that God doesn't want us to grumble like Israel. You have an opportunity to cover as much ground on this trip as you can. Complaining and wishing you were somewhere else, especially if spoken, will stunt your

growth. Your trip will be more rewarding and you will be able to be a better leader and change more people's lives if you are an example of pushing when noone feels like it.

"Solitude is a silent storm that breaks down all our dead branches. Yet it sends our living roots deeper into our Spirit."

[2] **You can do anything.** There is nothing too difficult for you through Him. Be like Joshua and Caleb who spied out the Promised Land and reported to Moses that it didn't matter how big they were...we can take them. Don't be like the other 8 spies who God killed for their unbelief and lack of faith. Remember the words of David: "You, O Lord, keep my lamp burning; with my God *I can scale a wall. He makes my feet like the feet of a deer; He enables me to stand on the heights. You broaden the path beneath me, so that my ankles do not turn. You make my adversaries bow at my feet.*" Psalm 18.

[3] **Enjoy the Leave No Trace** aspect of the trip. The Leave No Trace/Outdoor Skills and Ethics part of the course that you will be taught may frustrate you at first because it appears tree-huggish. Your camp-sites will be randomly inspected for food particles around your "kitchen" and for places where you didn't properly water down areas where you spit out tooth-paste. They really mean no trace. Don't be frustrated. I came to a couple of conclusions during my semester that helped me maintain a positive outlook on this [REDACTED] aspect of the NOLS philosophy. First, you can think about it militarily. Pretend you are in a long-range patrol unit with your tarp group and you can't leave anything for the enemy to find. If this doesn't get it done

remember this: The Leave No Trace doctrine is really great. That's right; as a Leave No Trace trainer myself I think it is really important for campers, hunters, or fisherman to treat the outdoors as good stewards. It isn't that we are saving the planet (which would be a touch over-ambitious) but we are taking care of what God has given us.

[4] **You will hit your wall.** It is important to understand that you will falter and fail. You are imperfect; we all are. The magic of a NOLS course is its ability to take you to your limit. If you didn't explore the boundaries of your own soul and map out the areas of your life that have become ingrown and weak...you have missed the point. So, the lesson: Don't be discouraged when you feel like "your heart and nerve and sinew" were stretched to breaking and now everyone can see who you really are. Don't feel that you have to start over after having come so far. That is the point. It is all about the journey. "A righteous man falls seven times *and rises again.*" Proverbs 24:16. The getting up is what makes the hero.

[5] **Have the heart of David...**Don't be scared of dying. Sounds funny, but hear me out. You will encounter obstacles and situations where you will be asked to "take a step," "just keep climbing," or "hold your partner's hand and cross a river" where your common sense screams..."You eat it!" This is the wrong response. There is nothing wrong, or even unwise, with taking some risk to achieve a goal or see yourself excel. I remember when you told me on the flight from New Zealand that you thought anyone who would want to climb Everest is just insane. Maybe, but it isn't a far cry from the

way those ballerina's feet look when its time to see who the best is. Remember this, God has ordained you to go and take this high ground...who can stand against you. So, take the step.

[6] **Enjoy yourself.** This may seem like common sense, but remember you really are coming home. At some point during the course you will say to a friend, "23 more days" and you will think how long that sounds. You will wonder how you will ever make it through that much difficulty and then, without warning, it will be over. So, the lesson: If it is possible, take it from me, have a great time. Don't forget, just because it has been engrained that the trip is about challenge, that you are on an amazing vacation that most people only imagine and some don't even know they should be. I don't want to state the obvious, but you are coming home and it won't be long before law school swallows you also. The memories from this trip will live forever. You will be sitting in a law library and the concept of Shelly's case will be contorting your mind when you will lean back in your chair to stretch and your gaze will stop on a picture on the wall. There you will be, sitting triumphantly on a pack, with your arms around your friends from NOLS. Please, make sure you are smiling in that picture.

[7] **Memorialize your experience.** You are probably thinking, of course I will. This will prove more difficult that it seems. Picture this, you will have just walked a few miles. That doesn't sound too hard. Now add these factors: with some of the most annoying people you have ever encountered, uphill, with sixty-pounds on your back, the

eighth day in a row, with sore legs, on two blisters, with no food since before the sun came up, with an attitude, wondering why you ever left. You will fall into your bag after dinner. Some will play cards. Others will make a hot drink while you listen to the soft pattering of the MSR Whisperlight International camp stove as they prime it to boil some water, you will want to do nothing. This is when writing in a journal, taking a couple of pictures, and most importantly taking the time to press into God while you are so close to Him is the most important. So, walk fifty yards away (take the trowel so everyone assumes you are not to be bothered) light a candle, take off your boots for the place where you are standing is holy, look up at that sky and ask Him to incline His ear to your prayer and make your trip worth remembering.

[8] **Try to enjoy the classes.** You and I are so similar, there is little doubt that the vast majority of the classes are going to stretch your patience. It isn't that you aren't going to learn stuff, but the instructors take the classes very seriously even though they are trying to make them laid-back and fun. I have gotten cross with instructors in class before just by not paying attention or looking interested...a lot of the stuff is very common sense. So, my advice: think of class as just a time to relax and take in the sights and smells. Think back to how hard you have to think when in class at home and enjoy the break.

[9] **Don't forget the big picture.** You are not trying to reach the top of Cloud or Bomber Peaks. You are reaching the summit of yourself. This knowledge will make

every step a little easier because only you will understand the importance of not quitting. You are on a quest. It isn't magical and it isn't spooky. But, it is very real. You not only follow me, but everyone who has ever strived to keep their lives on the road God has called them to and accepted the challenge everytime.

[10] **You will meet Stephanie.** We joke a lot about this one, but I feel that the most difficult person you will deal with on this course will be you. This is true for everyone that has ever had to look into the magic mirror of the Never Ending Story. It was true for me. At first, I hesitate to even try and write about this one. There is no "heads up" I can really give. You will have to just see what you see ... what you are shown. I think though, that what you thought was strong will be made weak and what you thought was weak will be proven strong. Remember when Luke had to go into the cave to find himself during his training with Yoda. Luke asks what is inside. Yoda answers...only what you take with you. It is essentially the same with you. I think, in the end, you will be pleased with what you see. Look on the bright side, I don't think Darth Vader is your father...

[11] **Respect authority.** Believe it or not, some of the most difficult people to deal with on this trip are going to be the instructors. [REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED] So, think about what you say and tell.

After all, you have a clean slate to draw yourself on. I tell you this not to arm you with insubordinate thought, but to make you aware of the factors that exist so you can operate with wisdom and respect.

[12] **Don't waste time wishing I was there to see it with you;** I am there. I wrote to you in my journal: "I am sitting in my sleeping bag, in my bivy sack, under my tarp. I am writing by the light of my candle. Baja has great night noises (aside from those resonating from my tarp mates). Lots of frogs and crickets. Amazing sky. I wish you were here to see it almost constantly." That was a true statement, but the difference with you is that you do have someone at home who truly understands what you are seeing...what you are feeling. Just soak it up for yourself and don't dwell on wishing someone was there to see it with you. This trip is for you.

[13] **I believe in you.** I don't need to tell you to come back with your shield. You will. I don't say this to mitigate in anyway the difficulties that you will overcome, but you should know that I really don't doubt your abilities at all. You will pass the test. You will meet God on the mountain where he has met many before you. Your flesh will be quieted and you will hear things that the Spirit has been trying to tell you. Most

importantly, you will gain a better understanding of how to get to that place when you aren't in the wilderness, but are surrounded with abundance, noise, and people.

[14] **You are being evaluated.** Don't forget that your instructors are evaluating your leadership (ie your heart to serve) as soon as you meet. They probably won't mention 'leaders of the day' or 'small groups' that first few days while you all travel in larger groups. They are just watching you all. You have a huge advantage, because most of your peers won't know they are being evaluated for leadership positions. So, learn as fast as you can and then help someone else who hasn't figured it out yet. Don't take the two hours they'll give you to get packed up. Get your stuff done and find out what needs to be done. Which leads to my last point.

[15] **You have to compete.** Don't think you can slide through this course on the "just wanna finish" plan. God has called you to be a leader. I know you have mentioned to me that this aspect of the trip has you most freaked out. You are a much stronger leader than you know. When it comes time to pick a leader of the day...volunteer. You will be worried about what the group will think and what kind of job you can do. The enemy will tell you that you aren't good enough at the maps to lead for a day. It is a lie. Surround yourself with the people who make up for your inabilities. Appoint a map-reader, let someone else walk in front for a couple of hours, and check on your group to make sure they are drinking enough and that their feet are okay. Lead from behind. Try and learn what leadership style works best for you. Get the groups input ...

"Prepare plans by consultation, and make war by wise guidance." Proverbs 20:18. Find out from them during the de-brief how you did. Make changes and improve. Remember this: "I, even I, am He who comforts you. Who are you that you fear mortal men, the sons of men, who are but grass, that you forget the Lord your Maker, who stretched out the heavens and laid the foundations of the earth that you live in constant terror everyday because of the wrath of the oppressor? The cowering prisoner will soon be set free; they will not die in their dungeon, nor will they lack bread. For I am the Lord your God, who churns up the sea so that its waves roar -- the Almighty is His name. I have put my words in your mouth and covered you with the shadow of My hand." Isaiah 51:12-16.

Silly Tips from your NOLS veteran brother:

1. [REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
2. Don't start looking for stuff to wipe with when you have to go. Begin this process during the day as you hike around. Keep four or five perfect acorns or small rocks (not too small) handy for an emergency in a ziplock bag. Note: NOLS food tends to make you have to go when you have to go so be prepared for a need to rush.
3. Always put your sleeping bag in your pack first and then fill all the space around it with the little stuff (like you tennis shoes, articles of clothing, journal case) that everyone else seems to be having the hardest time finding a place for. This will make your pack tight around the base and take care of the loose things that you don't want sloshing around the top of your pack.
4. Drink water like you have lost your mind. Just cause you're not thirsty doesn't mean you don't need water. Getting dehydrated can make you really sick. Not to mention, as much as two percent dehydration can substantially diminish your ability to perform physically and therefore feel good.

5. Always...keep a lighter inside your shorts in that little inner pocket or somewhere close to your body. This way if everything gets wet you'll have a dry lighter. This will be handy. Also, if you get separated from the group without your pack you will be able to start a big ass fire so they can find you by air.
6. Make sure and pack your journal/Bible case a few inches from the bottom of your pack in case the bottom of your pack gets wet.
7. When they teach the trucker's hitch knot for putting up your tarp learn it well. It will make life easier.
8. Try this hotdrink: cocoa mix, a little powdered milk, a touch of cinnamon, and a touch of vanilla. It is in the cookery called Super something...
9. Try not to get too attached to the following: lemonade mix, cocoa mix, sugar or any other flavoring item. These extras run out quick and getting pissed at your tarp mates taking more then their share is a mistake. Just get it through your head that they don't matter and you will be happier.
10. Put everything that matters to you in ziplock bags.
11. When you go to sleep at night place a trash bag over your pack. I mean like put the whole top part in the trash bag. That way the dew, mist, and maybe rain won't soak everything. Also, if the bottom half of your sleeping bag and bivy are getting wet at night stick your legs in a trash bag also.

12. Buy candles from the NOLS store to take. They are great to read and write by when you don't want to waste your headlamp batteries.
13. Carry twice as many batteries as you are told to...you'll need them and they will be like money in two weeks.
14. Take a big ziplock full of candy bars and keep it a secret. After you just can't stand it anymore, wait longer, then when you really can't stand it anymore break it out during a nightly meeting and treat the group to Snicker's bars or something. You'll be a hero for carrying them that long.
15. Very important: Take pictures of everything you will want your new buddies to see. You will be trying to explain things that you never thought you would want a picture of. You may not take them all with you in the field, but take them to show everyone once you get back. Take a big stack of photos into the field though. You'll be glad to have them when you want to miss us and when you want to show everyone your brother.

The following are a few tips from Devon Bertram...one of my NOLS buddies who emailed me her advice:

- umm make sure you notice the minute difference in color between potato pearls and powdered milk. only one tastes good in granola and hot cocoa.
- find a good spades partner
- don't eat dried refried beans. they're disgusting.

- don't waste energy and time on the little stuff, there's too much to experience out there to get consumed by pettiness--perhaps that's a given.
- be a part of the food sorting crew....easy and fun and get to pick the goods.

These are all great advice. She is poking fun at me about the powdered milk because I made cocoa once potato pearls...nasty. The last one is a great tip. It refers to volunteering for food duty at the re-ration time. Everyone will have to help do something, but you need to volunteer to sort the food bags so that you can skim the extras (small cocoa bags no one will miss, sugar, lemonade...) off the top of the other groups portion and keep it for your group. This requires having two/three close accomplices that you trust not to rat you out and that won't turn around and do the same to you...

Also, a favor to ask: Please buy a bunch (I mean like 15-20) NOLS croakies for sun glasses and coffee socks. I want a bunch of them.

I think you'll recognize this:

It doesn't interest me what you do for a living. I want to know what you ache for, and if you dare to dream of meeting your heart's longing.

It doesn't interest me how old you are. I want to know if you will risk looking like a fool for love, for your dreams, for the adventure of being alive.

It doesn't interest me what planets are squaring in your moon. I want to know if you have touched the center of your own sorrow, if you have been opened by life's betrayals or have become shriveled and closed from fear of further pain. I want to know if you can sit with pain, mine or your own, without moving to hide it, or fade it, or fix it. I want to know if you can be with joy, mine or your own, if you can dance with wildness and let ecstasy fill you to the tips of your fingers and toes without cautioning us to be careful, be realistic, or to remember the limitations of being human.

It doesn't interest me if the story you are telling me is true. I want to know if you can disappoint another to be true to yourself; if you can bear the accusation of betrayal and not betray your own soul. I want to know if you can be faithful and therefore trustworthy. I want to know if you can see beauty even when it's not pretty everyday, and if the source of your life is God's presence. I want to know if you can live with failure, yours and mine, and still stand on the edge of a lake and shout to the sliver of the moon, "Yes!" I want to know if you can get up after the night and grief and despair, weary and bruised to the bone and do what needs to be done.

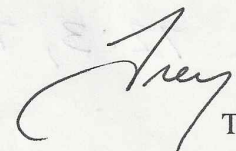
It doesn't interest me who you are or how you came to be here. I want to know if you will stand in the center of the fire with me and not shrink back.

It doesn't interest me where or what or with whom you have studied. I want to know what sustains you from the inside when all else falls away. I want to know if you can be alone with yourself and if you truly like the company you keep in empty moments.

- Oriah Mountain Dreamer
Indian Elder, May 1994

Well, have a great time. Be strong. And, "pick a flower for me should one line your path." I love you.

Your Bubba



Trey

You will be hidden from the scourge of
the tongue,

Neither will you be afraid of violence when
it comes.

You will laugh at violence and famine,

Neither will you be afraid of wild beasts.

For you will be in league with the stones
of the field;

And the beasts of the field will be at
peace with you.

And you will know that your tent is secure.

Psalm 43:3

Job 5:21-24

Psalm 20

Psalm 72:3, 75:3