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Tara Cobb
College of DuPage

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Of Rabbits and Raspberries

Tara Cobb

There are certain things that every child hears at one point or another. Although “Don’t run in the house,” and “Do I have to turn this car around and go home?” may top the list, “What do you want to be when you grow up?” is a close runner-up.

I recall one day when my kindergarten teacher, Miss Patton, directed us to from a haphazardly-shaped circle on the brightly colored rug and asked us that age-old question.

“Danny, what do you want to be when you grow up?”

“I want to be a police man, Miss Patton!”

“Colleen, what do you want to be?”

“I want to be a ballerina!”

“Kelly?”

“A teacher!”

“Justin?”

“Baseball player!”

“Lynn?” “Robin?” “Corey?”

“Actress!” “Fire fighter!” “President!”

Then it was my turn. “Tara, what do you want to be when you grow up?”

“I want to be a camper!” I proclaimed proudly.

“You want to be a what?” questioned my teacher.

“A camper,” I repeated. I tried to explain what I meant by that and what I thought a camper might do with her life but my four-year-old vocabulary just wasn’t up to the task. I tried to tell them that I wanted to live in a log cabin or maybe even a cave. I wanted to grow my food and study the animals. I wanted to learn from the Natural world and feel a harmonious balance within it and the life around me. I wanted to find God in the rabbit den, in the firewood, in the wild raspberries. I wanted to have a deeply profound “On Walden Pond” type of experience. Of course, I had neither the words to express this nor the cognitive ability to fully understand it myself. All I could manage was that I wanted to live in a cave with rabbits and eat raspberries. Nobody seemed to understand me. All the other children thought that a camper was a very strange choice of career. They tried to suggest other options.

“How ‘bout a vet-near-narian? You wanna fix up all the pet bunnies?” offered one girl.

“You could work at the Jewel and sell raspberries. That’s where my mom goes when she wants to get food. You could work there,” suggested another boy.

I tried to explain to them that I wanted to be a camper and only a camper. They seemed disappointed and gave me a funny look that I hadn’t seen before but would later come to recognize as a combination of confusion, scorn, and dismissal. It was at that moment, sitting on a thread-bare rug in the back of Miss Patton’s classroom, surrounded by incredulous kindergartners that I got my first inkling that I might not be like the other children.