

## Drumbeat Reflection: Belden Lane

Belden Lane is a Wisdom Elder with Illuman, a backpacker and storyteller, a Professor Emeritus of Saint Louis University, and author of *The Solace of Fierce Landscapes: Exploring Desert and Mountain Spirituality*.

Maybe it's my fascination with the connection between spirituality and place, but one of the things I remember most about various Rites of Passage, Firmings, and retreats that I've shared with the men of MALEs are the wilderness places themselves.

We remember the places of our transformation. They are imprinted on our brains. To go back to the site in our memory is to recall the power of the experience there. The life of Moses was changed by an image of fire near Mt. Horeb in the Sinai Desert. The apostle Paul never forgot what happened to him on the Damascus road. John Muir was transformed by wandering the High Sierras of California.

On nights when I have trouble getting to sleep, I'll go back to contemplative sits on the sandy banks of Aravaipa Creek...gazing through the branches of cottonwood trees to the red cliffs of Brandenburg Mountain. Aravaipa Canyon Ranch rests like a quiet, centering place in the heart.

Then there's the back porch of the retreat house overlooking the Shenandoah River at Rolling Ridge in the Blue Ridge Mountains of West Virginia, where the DC Area MALEs meet. The woods and prairie land around Pilgrim Park in northern Illinois, west of Chicago, is the transformational home of the Illinois MALEs. The pine forest surrounding the Feliciana Center in central Louisiana is home to the Men Entering Sacred Space of the Bayou State. These are places I've come to love.

I connect the faces of men who have changed my life to the sound of loons on the lake at the Audubon Center of the North Woods in Sandstone, Minnesota. I can hear the lusty voices of men singing at the St. Patrick's Centre near Kiltegan in the Wicklow Mountains of Ireland. I'll never forget the laughter of brothers at Camp Somerset on the edge of the bush in Queensland, Australia, west of Brisbane. The great oaks surrounding the Bield at Blackruthen, a spirituality center near the Highlands outside Perth, Scotland, summon me to the magic of a forgotten world.

Ghost Ranch, New Mexico, of course, is a place close to the heart of many of us who have been through the Rites there. We have warm memories of hikes into Box Canyon or up Kitchen Mesa. Others of us can savor the memory of New Mexico's Hummingbird Camp in Jemez Springs and the glorious view of Mount Taylor from atop Red Mesa. The places where we've laughed, cursed, and cried together hold for us the power of God's work in our lives. They return us to ourselves.