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The tracker: the books of Tom Brown, Jr.

by Carol Meyer

Eco Catholic

I'm guessing that many of you have never heard of Tom Brown, Jr. He's not a well-known name in Catholic or ecology circles. He's not a scholar, theologian, or environmentalist per se. His claim to fame is that he knows the ways of nature at a level not even fathomed by most people.

Tom has written 16 books on his personal experiences of tracking and surviving in nature, and operates the Tom Brown Jr. Tracker School in New Jersey.

I happened upon Tom's first book, *The Tracker*, some 25 years ago and was immediately hooked. His adventures were new and exciting to me and resonated with some deep part of my soul. In the course of the next few years, I read all of his books, except the field guides to survival, and they made a deep impact on me and I remember them still.

Here's Tom's story. When he was seven growing up in New Jersey, a Native American elder named Stalking Wolf, or simply Grandfather, took Tom under his wing and, for the next 10 years, taught him about the ways of nature and how to survive in it. Stalking Wolf also shared his deep reverence for nature as a spiritual reality. After some years of perfecting his skills mostly in the wilderness without benefit of tools, Tom worked with law enforcement officials tracking people. Several years later, he started a very successful tracking school, which has been in operation for 30 years. And, of course, he wrote books.

Why do they matter and why do I highly recommend reading them? Because they will give you entrance into a world you will probably never encounter otherwise. Because you will learn something of the Native American approach to the world as a bio-spiritual reality. Because the storytelling will lure you in, fascinating you with feats in nature thought impossible. Because you will come to love Grandfather, and feel yourself sitting at his feet absorbing his deep wisdom about life lived close to nature.

Tom Brown, Jr. knows the details and ways of the natural world and animals through and through, and reading his books, you get a vicarious experience of what it is like to be one with nature, living in harmony with its pristine essence. These books might well be partly fiction, but it matters not. Like the Bible, truth is a deeper reality than mere facts. Reading Brown will get you out of your head and give you the pure pleasure of being immersed in creation.

These books remind me of the scriptures that talk about God choosing the small of this world to confound the wise. Tom Brown is not highly-educated, intellectual, or a great writer, but simply a man who has developed a high level of spiritual consciousness because of the enormous amount of time spent in solitude in the wilderness.

So, if you want a change of pace, you might set aside your reading about all of the ecology problems in our day, and enjoy a bit of balm and inspiration for your heart and soul by reading Tom Brown, Jr. You'll be double motivated to protect our beautiful Earth and maybe spend more time outdoors.

NCR's Eco Catholic Blog

Eco Catholic is an exploration of the green Catholic imagination and ecological spirituality. Contributors include Rich Heffern, *NCR* staff writer, columnist and author, and Carol Meyer, executive director of the Sustainable Sanctuary Coalition.

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