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Ek stasis

Lindsey Campbell

James Madison University

“The contemporary synonym is delight or rapture, but the word’s ancient Greek roots—ek stasis—as some sources have it, mean ‘outstanding’ or ‘standing outside ourselves.’”

—*Last Child in the Woods: Saving Our Children from Nature-Deficit Disorder*

Then.

The light was always a little bit green, isolating the backyard from the rest of the world. The leaves on the trees were thick and you couldn't see the sky, but the sun shone brightly enough. The old trees loomed over the grass, their shadows cloaking the yard in stillness. The wind never blew, or it seemed like it anyway, and in my memory, the yard and time stand perfectly still.

I am closing my eyes, and I'm remembering a Me twelve years gone, one that played all day and never worried about getting a little dirty. I see how the warm light floods into my yard from across the street where there are fewer trees, and how it mixes with the light from above, illuminating the shadows. I see the three tall trees and the short, scrubby one, and the old, dead tree covered in fuzzy ropes of poison ivy. Their trunks form the boundaries of the yard, their branches above me extending like a bridge connecting the edges. The squirrels scamper from tree to tree; they always take the same route, and I wonder if there is a designated roadmap in the sky above my yard.

I hear birds and the little frogs we call "spring peepers," loud but out of sight, the invisible soundtrack to my adventures. I cannot describe the smell, except that it is more like a taste but also inseparable from a feeling. The air is different... I sense it in the back of my throat, cool, damp, and earthy, like dirt and thick, healthy plants; I feel it on my face, refreshing and almost like walking through water, except I'm still dry. I see it all in perfect stillness, a living memory that I can pick up at any moment.

Standing at the edge of the yard, I look at the places where I usually play. I look at the woods...too dark today. Today it's just me, and I'm not brave enough to leave the path to the creek and forage through the leaves and vines and bushes by myself. I see the fort, barely visible from the front for the pile of firewood that makes up its sturdiest wall.

Not today. Today, for whatever reason, I am looking at the hills, sloping gently in the sun out of the tree-lined boundary. They've always been there, but today it feels like I've noticed them for the first time. It feels like mapping out new territory as I carefully examine each one, noting the hill with the deepest valley between that would make a good hiding place, and the one with a hole on the top where maybe some kind of animal lives. They reach into my neighbor's yard—a momentary pause. Am I allowed to play here? Quickly it becomes an objective that will take an entire afternoon: run the length of the hills as quietly and quickly as possible – not an easy task, since they're covered and filled by crunchy leaves.

I stand there at the top of the first hill, silently appraising my task. There are four hilltops, three valleys, and too many leaves. I take some practice steps where I'm standing. By lowering my weight carefully, slowly, inch by painstaking inch, I can render only a muffled crunch at best, still far from silent. I try again. This process is absurdly slow. I pretend my clunky Skechers are beautiful, handmade deerskin moccasins, soft and perfectly molded to my feet. They are dainty and delicate, and maybe some of their grace will rub off on me. I lower my moccasin-clad foot to the ground again, listening closely. Nothing.

I'm ready. I leap from a standstill, bounding across the first valley onto the first hilltop. In my mind, I'm running through a shadowed forest, nimble and agile, dodging trees and branches as the wind flows past my face and I race toward something incredible, or maybe away from something bad. Nothing and no one can catch me. I pretend as though I've been raised in the wild, seeing myself slinking effortlessly across the leaves and twigs and leaving no trace. I push harder. Faster. I'm no longer running or sprinting, I'm gliding—no, flying—across the hills, my feet skimming the ground just

long enough to push me further forward, and I am more a part of the air than I am the earth. I hold my breath and tense each muscle as if this will make me lighter. My step widens, and I dart from side to side like a speed skater, and now it's just my toes brushing the ground as I race across the leaves.

I'm on the other side. I sweat and try to catch my breath. I feel as if I'm sinking, slowly coming back down into myself. I'm no longer lighter than air. Reality settles in around my shoulders, and I am firmly grounded again. My moccasins turn back into Skechers, and the forest turns back into my backyard. I look around. I see the swing set, the neighbor's fence, the cars parked on the street between my house and the next.

Now.

I'm 22 now, and my world is strange and lived mostly indoors. Occasionally, I glimpse the sunshine as I rush from place to place. Now I'm a "grown up," no longer a little girl with her head in the clouds and her feet in her shoes, but a "young woman" with her face in a computer and her head clouded with worries and fears and questions. My world is lit by screens and desk lamps late at night and the horrible fluorescents in the library, and it smells of coffee, coffee, and more coffee. Now, I'm running to catch the bus, running late for my exam, running out of time to just be a kid again. *This can't be the growing up I couldn't wait to do.*

No. No, because I remember, and I know it's not.

I look around and everyone is so busy, so consumed by their majors and clubs and grades and cellphones, and everything is so boringly empty, but to me, none of it matters. What's real to me, what matters most, is alive and well in my mind. There will always be some part of me that's never fully grounded, ready to leap into flight in the

blink of an eye. I have a part of me I will never lose, and I know it when I gaze up at the trees in my yard or walk the dogs over those still-enticing hills. There's a part of me that's always clad in moccasins, always stepping lightly through leaves and life toward something beautiful.

Works Cited

Louv, Richard. *Last Child in the Woods: Saving Our Children from Nature-Deficit Disorder*. Chapel Hill: Algonquin Books of Chapel Hill, 2005. Print.