



A Paradoxical Struggle, by Paul Fleischman

The life of peace is like an international flight permitting only one handbag. You'll have to leave behind some of your cherished shoes and appliances. The international traveler, the hiker, and the climber feel relieved by what they have discarded. Carrying one knapsack, they step higher, feel lighter. Not mere returning towards peace, but selecting what to abandon and what to bring along is a necessary skill in the life of peace. Selectively trimming your life to optimize your core goal isn't comfortable, because the human mammal we all inhabit is a vigilant, expanding predator. Each of us is a survivor carefully selected by nature during eons of evolution to optimize continuity, procreation, multiplication. We are animals built to triumph in competitive adaptation, and our minds are tools for victory. Mirroring the biological imperatives of our animal aggression, our psyche is never naturally at peace. Scanning present, past, and future we creatively anticipate and retrospectively struggle, to master all conditions. Like hunters, we dream into the future, desiring and fearing, scheming. Like prey, we fret and remember the past to avoid reencountering ambushes. Our mental processes follow the call of our instincts to acquire, to protect. The yearning for peace is a paradoxical struggle because it yearns against the scales and feathers of our animal vigilance. To be at peace, we must relinquish the continuous control of circumstance that our animal demands. Our self-protective environmental groomings won't go away when we solve one more situational problem. We will remain hyperalert with desire and fear unless we set up a countercurrent to prevail. Peace is not just a more or better way to be human, the amplification of an urge. Peace is also a determination to become less human. It necessitates knowledge, choice, and effort at leaving behind our weapons and worries. It requires force: a selective pushing beyond, a rising above. Inner peace is a transformation by courage. --Paul Fleischman