

To Jack and Tom

by C. Bernard McCartan

Walk softly, my sons,
for you begin a journey now
which can mold your future,
build your character,
strengthen your body,
enrich your life,
and establish memories
pure golden, nuggets, jewels,
precious as tomorrow.

Walk softly, my sons,
because as you do, you have
your chance to experience,
to learn, to love God's
great out-of-doors.

Walk softly, my sons!
How important is it
that I tell you this?
To many it seems of less importance
than many things of minor value.
But to your Dad, and I hope
to you, my young sons,
it is life itself.

It has been my love,
my teacher, my friend,
my touch with reality.
It has made me a better man,
a stronger man,
and as age has gripped me,
a gentler man.

Important for you?
Ah Yes! I think it so.
But your decision it must be
to love God's great out-of-doors.
For you I cannot make it.

I can teach you to hunt,
to fish, to mirror beauty
on a face of Kodak film.
I can teach you to walk
over green forested hills,
along cool streams of water fresh,
amongst spring's host of flowers.
But I cannot teach you to enjoy

the anticipation of an empty sky,
when all the ducks and geese
have to the southward made their flight
to defeat the rush of winter's storms.
I can teach you to fish,
but you yourself
must bear and learn to enjoy
even those fishless days
when all your skills are for naught
against the instinct, the skills
of the speckled trout or
the fighting bass.

You my sons,
will have to learn
that inexplicable urge
to make that one last cast
and catch, perhaps, your fish.

And if you do,
you'll be a sportsman,
a hiker, a fisherman,
a lover of God's every creature;
not a killer,
but a taker of fish
or one who savors the beauty
of it all. You'll be a man.

You, my sons, you'll learn
to be a visitor in the out-of-doors,
to let your canoe glide silently,
riding the breast of rivulet and wave.
And seek the solitude of your inner self;
you must be a guest in a world
precious but so easily destroyed.
You cannot master it.
You can destroy it.
But don't, my sons, don't!

No matter what
your station in life may be
you will have found,
as I have found,
your love, your teacher,
your touchstone of reality.
And God upon you will smile.

-DAD