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Topic: Fear or Connections

## Connections

A circle of chairs. Stone fireplace at one end and a kitchen at the other, its sliding silver windows along the serving line closed but unable to keep the food prep noises contained. Tables on the sides containing markers, name tags, sign-up sheets, mugs, masks, water bottles, plastic cups, drums, jackets. Wide windows looking out at ever-greens and high desert brush.

Thirty plus men were greeting each other with hugs and slaps on the back, grabbing a coffee or filling water bottles from one of two blue barrel containers as we were called to circle-up.

I recognized two-thirds of the men from previous Weekends. Part of a national organization, I founded this center in 2008 in Prescott. I had been “called” to this work of mentoring teenage boys through a rites of passage experience and had flown in the day before to staff, this time as a “grandfather” as opposed to leader.

It had been a year and I didn’t realize how thirsty I was to be in this environment, for after being introduced and asked to say a few words, I was overcome with emotion, like a gasp for air. It only lasted a few seconds, but behind my scrunched-up eyes was so much gratitude. For the men who had been with me from the beginning, for the men who kept showing up, for the lives transformed, for the second generation of leaders that were mentored by the generation I mentored.

Asked how I got the center established from scratch, I said, “coffee.” The creation story involved me talking to men over coffee, sharing stories from other centers I had staffed. The founding question became, “Were you enrolled by Richard, tearing up over coffee?”

I was one of the “grandfathers” on this weekend, a role honored multiple times. Certainly, for our age and the decades of experience on the planet. Also, for the unfiltered love a grandfather gives to his grandchildren. In practice, sitting on a white plastic chair in 40-degree weather as an initiate sits opposite, some nervous, unsure and unable to look me in the eye,

others more present and confident. My intention is to speak to the light within them, to let them know I was there to support their gift being revealed in support of our tribe.

The richness comes from working with the boys, facilitating one on one or coaching them in processes. Intuition tells a man when working with a 14 yr. old who lives in a foster home, abandoned by his parents and relatives, that he might want a hug. He asks him. Hesitant at first, then he glomps on and doesn't let go for five minutes.

By the end of the Weekend my soul was replenished, overflowing, with love. Asked to bless the newly initiated boys who were now considered Journeymen (on their way to manhood), I stood and once again was immediately overcome with emotion. Seconds later I was thanking them for the privilege and honor of supporting their journey.