



## Animal Medicine Experience/Encounter Summary

Name:

Mark Ford

Date or Time of Year of Experience/Encounter:

Summer of 2003 – about 9pm.

Location of Experience Encounter:

A Catholic retreat center outside of Newark, NJ. On a walking trail in a forested part of the retreat center grounds.

Identify Animal(s) in Your Experience/Encounter and Physical Description (gender, age range, markings, unique qualities or characteristics of animal, etc.):

A Great Horned Owl – adult, male, brown-white and cinnamon colored, about 2ft. tall. Deep/lower octave hoots during the encounter.

Summary of Experience/Encounter (Describe what happened):

I was leading a 7-day retreat for a group of Catholic nuns and we talked about Animal Medicine. Several sisters said that they had seen and heard an owl during nature walks in the evening. I had

shared with them that owl was an important medicine animal for me throughout my lifetime. I had brought my sacred pipe which had just been given for me to carry. I really wanted to adorn it with owl feathers. After the 2<sup>nd</sup> night, I would go out nightly to see if I could encounter the owl and possibly scavenge for owl feathers. It wasn't until the last night of the retreat that I found him. I had heard his call, but he would fly from one tree to the other as he were trying to play hide and seek with me. He stopped hooting so I went to the tree where I thought I had seen him fly and there he was in sitting on a branch about 20 ft above me. He was looking down at me. I began to speak to him and told him how sacred and special "owl medicine" has been throughout my life. I let him know that my intentions were to make the pipe I was caring for more sacred by decorating it with an owl feather. I let him know that I would be honored if I could find an owl feather to add to the pipe. He hooted 2 times and flapped his wings and flew away out of sight. At first, I was so disappointed, but as I began to walk away, I looked down at next to where I stood were 3 owl feathers. They were the same color that the owl that was communicating with me was.

## Your Interpretation of What the Experience/Encounter Meant for You:

I felt that the owl was challenging me go on a quest to be able to communicate with it by not letting me know that it was present during the previous nights before my encounter with it. Even on the night I saw the owl, it would fly from tree to tree evading me or making me work for what I wanted from him.

What surprised me was that I felt that he heard everything I said and knew what I wanted from him before I even said it. I felt that I was in the presence of the divine/sacred. At first, when he flew off into the distance, I thought that he decided not to grant my request. It was only when I looked down and saw the 3 feathers together that I realized he gifted me more than what I had asked for.

I also think because of my intentions were pure and that the feathers would be used during ceremony with the pipe, that my request was granted. Every time I look at my pipe or use it, I am reminded of the sacred medicine that bestowed upon me from owl.

Owl always has symbolized for me the ability to see through the darkness (of the night, of a struggle in life, or a dark period in my life). Owl is a guide, teacher, wisdom keeper and old soul medicine for me. Except when it hoots, it quiet, patient, always observant and aware of its surroundings.

The medicine that owl gave me that night is meant to be used to help and heal others, to guide those who are stuck in the darkness of the night, their lives or their souls.

Any Other Details, Reflections, or Observations You Would Like to Share About this Experience/Encounter?

I found it interesting that though I was leading a retreat for a group of nuns, I felt that this was one of the most spiritually rewarding retreats that I have had been on, mainly because of the encounter/experience with the great horned owl but because we focused on listen to nature and being open to experiences with animal medicine.