

Liz Caile Essay Contest 2011

1st place **Teagen Blakey** age:16

"Indian Summer"

When the tall grasses of our meadow have dried and withered, and the music of our stream has ceased to play, I can sense that fall is on its way. Just when months of cold and snow seem imminent a last surge of southern weather arrives to ripen the green tomatoes on our windowsills.

My fourteenth birthday in late October of 2008 was one of those beautiful days of Indian summer. I was to be found at the edge of a bright clearing while the Steller's Jays sounded their disapproval from the nearby trees. I paid them no heed as I contentedly searched for old branches to support a bent sapling for the heavy snows to come. Gradually the disapproving calls died away. Instead the sound of crying from my young neighbor penetrated the forest. Listening closer, I began to realize that what I heard was not the typical cry of a child. The call sounded through the trees at very timely pace, like that of a metronome. Finally I convinced myself to glance around. What my eyes found was another set of dark eyes turned calmly toward me from the end of a fifty-foot fallen spruce, whose upturned roots rose several feet in front of me. Instantly I fell deadly still for fear I would startle the elegant creature. Unperturbed, the bobcat called again, turned away from me, and picked its way toward a cluster of small trees to the right, behind which it disappeared.

As I watched, wondering whether the enigmatic cat would emerge from behind the trees while I remained at the edge of the clearing, I noticed movement between the branches. From what I could make out there seemed to be more than one shape hidden behind the saplings. Then, unmistakably, a young, curious face peeked out at me from between the

needles.

Out from the safety of the branches came the full-grown bobcat followed by her blatantly curious kitten. Not in any hurry, as we humans so often are, the two felines picked their way among the brambles and fallen trees to disappear under the largest, which lay perpendicular to me.

As feeling returned to my still limbs part of me said it was time to go, but I remained silently where I was. Then out from under the tree came the mother bobcat. While she curled up contentedly in a bramble free patch of sunlight her light colored kitten made its way onto the trunk, a little more than halfway down. Sitting there, it examined me curiously like a tiny child looking over a rock at their feet.

Eventually the trusting mother left her sunning spot, and leapt lightly onto the tree in front of her kitten. After demonstrating a perfect cat stretch she turned to face me. Over the next many minutes she walked lightly toward me, pausing now and then. At some point, while she stood free of the undergrowth, but not of her veil of mystery and awe, her curious child returned to the camouflage of the forest.

At last, seven feet away from me, the bobcat stopped on the tree's upturned roots. By this point I'd decided that my companion was close enough. If she stepped farther toward me I would draw back. For the time being though we each remained where we were. I gazed up into her exquisite face with black markings etched onto light gray, and into her deep, dark eyes. For several long moments we both just stood there. Finally she began to give a gentle growl. I didn't need to speak her language to understand her polite dismissal.

Consciously I turned my eyes away from her, and slightly reluctantly crunched through the dried brambles. As I walked sideways toward the young spruce where my jacket hung, the mother's growling became more insistent. To her it appeared as though I sought to circle behind her toward her hidden kitten. On the contrary, after retrieving my jacket I

retreated. Once several yards separated us she ceased her dismissal. Stepping toward me, she lowered her eyes for a moment as she sniffed the air where I had stood. When she raised them again they seemed to say, "So that's who you are."

As she turned her back on me and nimbly leapt from the tree I knew it was really time to leave. Though we had parted, I would take with me the memory of that extraordinary Indian summer day.