***“Where I Lived and What I Lived For”***excerpts from ***Walden***an essayby Henry David Thoreau

**1** When first I took up my abode in the woods, that is, began to spend my nights as well as days there, which, by accident, was on Independence Day, or the Fourth of July, 1845, my house was not finished for winter, but was merely a defense against the rain, without plastering or chimney, the walls being of rough, weather-stained boards, with wide chinks, which made it cool at night. The upright white hewn studs and freshly planed door and window casings gave it a clean and airy look, especially in the morning, when its timbers were saturated[[1]](#footnote-1) with dew, so that I fancied that by noon some sweet gum would exude[[2]](#footnote-2) from them.

**2** Every morning was a cheerful invitation to make my life of equal simplicity, and I may say innocence, with Nature herself. I have been a sincere worshiper of Aurora[[3]](#footnote-3) as of the best things which I did. They say that characters were engraven on the bathing tub of King Tching-thang to this effect: “Renew thyself completely each day; do it again, and again, and forever again.” I can understand that. Morning brings back the heroic ages…All memorable events, I should say, transpire in morning time and in a morning atmosphere…To him whose elastic and vigorous thought keeps pace with the sun, the day is a perpetual morning. It matters not what the clocks say or the attitudes and labors of men. Morning is when I am awake and there is a dawn in me. Moral reform is the effort to throw off sleep…The millions are awake enough for physical labor; but only one in million is awake enough for effective intellectual exertion, only one in a hundred millions to a poetic or divine life. To be awake is to be alive. I have never yet met a man who was quite awake. How could I have looked him in the face?

**3** We must learn to reawaken and keep ourselves awake, not by mechanical aids, but by an infinite expectation of the dawn, which does not forsake us in our soundest sleep. I know of no more encouraging fact than the unquestionable ability of man to elevate his life by a conscious endeavor. It is something to be able to paint a particular picture, or to carve a statue, and so to make a few objects beautiful; but it is far more glorious to carve and paint the very atmosphere and medium through which we look, which morally we can do. To affect the quality of the day, that is the highest of arts…

**4** I went to the woods because I wished to live deliberately, to front only the essential facts of life, and see if I could not learn what it had to teach, and not, when I came to die, discover that I had not lived. I did not wish to live what was not life, living is so dear; nor did I wish to practice resignation, unless it was quite necessary. I wanted to live deep and suck out all the marrow of life, to live so sturdily and Spartan-like [[4]](#footnote-4)as to put to rout[[5]](#footnote-5) all that was not life, to cut a broad swath and shave close, to drive life into a corner, and reduce it to its lowest terms, and, if it proved to be mean, why then to get the whole and genuine meanness of it, and publish its meanness to the world; or if it were sublime[[6]](#footnote-6), to know it by experience, and be able to give a true account of it in my next excursion. For most men, it appears to me, are in a strange uncertainty about it, whether it is of the devil or of God, and have somewhat hastily concluded that it is the chief end of man here to "glorify God and enjoy him forever."

**5** Still we live meanly, like ants; though the fable tells us that we were long ago changed into men; like pygmies we fight with cranes[[7]](#footnote-7); it is error upon error, and clout[[8]](#footnote-8) upon clout, and our best virtue has for its occasion a superfluous[[9]](#footnote-9) and evitable[[10]](#footnote-10) wretchedness. Our life is frittered away by detail. An honest man has hardly need to count more than his ten fingers or in extreme cases he may add his ten toes, and lump the rest. Simplicity, simplicity, simplicity! I say, let your affairs be as two or three, and not a hundred or a thousand; instead of a million count half a dozen, and keep your accounts on your thumb-nail…Simplify, simplify. Instead of three meals a day, if it be necessary eat but one; instead of a hundred dishes, five; and reduce other things in proportion…The nation itself, with all its so-called internal improvements, which, by the way are all external and superficial, is just such an unwieldy and overgrown establishment, cluttered with furniture and tripped up by its own traps, ruined by luxury and heedless expense, by want of calculation and a worthy aim, as the million households in the land; and the only cure for it, as for them, is in a rigid economy, a stern and more than Spartan simplicity of life and elevation of purpose. It lives too fast. Men think that it is essential that the Nation have commerce, and export ice, and talk through a telegraph, and ride thirty miles an hour, without a doubt, whether they do or not; but whether we should live like baboons or like men, is a little uncertain…We do not ride on the railroad; it rides upon us. Did you ever think what those sleepers are that underlie the railroad? Each one is a man, an Irishman, or a Yankee man. The rails are laid on them, and they are covered with sand, and the cars run smoothly over them.

**6** …When we are unhurried and wise, we perceive that only great and worthy things have any permanent and absolute existence, that petty fears and petty pleasures are but the shadow of the reality. This is always exhilarating and sublime. By closing the eyes and slumbering, and consenting to be deceived by shows, men establish and confirm their daily life of routine and habit everywhere, which still is built on purely illusory foundations. Children, who play life, discern its true law and relations more clearly than men, who fail to live it worthily, but who think that they are wiser by experience, that is, by failure…

1. saturated: soaked, full to capacity [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. exude: to ooze or spread in all directions [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Aurora: Greek goddess of dawn [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. Spartan-like: the inhabitants of the ancient Greek city-state of Sparta were famed for their courage, discipline, and frugality [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. rout: scatter; to put to flight [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. sublime: of such excellence, grandeur, or beauty as to inspire great admiration or awe [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. like…cranes: In the Iliad, the Trojans are compared to cranes fighting against pygmies. [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. clout: a heavy hit with the hand or a hard object [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. superfluous: unnecessary, especially through being more than enough [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. evitable: avoidable [↑](#footnote-ref-10)