



The Tiger in the Tall Grass

Dr. Robert Enright

International Forgiveness Institute

1127 University Avenue, #105

Madison, WI 53715-1021

www.internationalforgiveness.com

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Please address correspondence to Robert Enright: robertenright1@gmail.com

The Tiger in the Tall Grass

Chapter 1

James and the Place of Peace

“No more! No more! No more! No more!” James talked like that sometimes when he was so angry with someone in the family. Do you know what his sister, Brigid, usually does when he does that? She makes fun of him. Today she said: “I like your Ray Charles imitation: Hit the road, Jack, and don’t you come back no more, no more, no more, no more.”

Even though James thought that was kind of funny, he was in no mood for it. He went as quickly as he could down the stairs, through the screened porch, across the driveway, and into his favorite spot of all---the tall grass that went all the way to Mr. Butcher’s, the neighbor’s, fence. The grass was so tall and so thick that he could crawl far into it and look out as if he were a spy, seeing others who did not see him. He didn’t even have to crouch so low because the grass was so towering. He once heard Mom refer to it as bluestem grass. He wasn’t quite sure what that meant. All he knew was that it made him feel cozy.

Today was hot, the kind of September hot that makes someone lie real still and want an ice cream cone. As he lay there, James felt protected by the grass and from the pain that was in his family. Lying there, he could hear his father yelling at Brigid. I think we’ll skip what he is saying because we all know what gruff language sounds like when an adult gets very mad at someone else in the family. James could hear Brigid cry and he

felt sorry for her, even if she made fun of him and thought that he was imitating Ray Charles.

“I wish it were different,” James said dreamily to himself as he lay in the grass. “I wish the world could be like this grassy place, with its coolness and peace and safety,” he said to no one in particular.

“It can be.” James jumped up and looked about. Is someone else in my grass, he wondered. “Who are you?” he asked. “Who would you like me to be?” the voice answered back. “Well, not Brian who tripped me in school on Friday, that’s for sure,” James shot back. “No, I will not trip you or trip you up,” the voice reassuringly said. It was a bit strange how James felt comforted by the voice that did not have a body connected to it.

“Here. I’m over here.” James followed the voice deeper into the grass. As he squinted hard to see who it was, his face brushed the face of someone. He tumbled back onto the springy grass and as he did, he saw a blur of orange right up into his face. He quickly shook his head, trying to get away from whomever or whatever this was. Yet, he could not. Whomever or whatever this was had a tickly, soft face, like the fur on an old teddy bear. James was pinned down and it was not by a weak old teddy bear, I assure you. By now, James’ heart was pounding and he wanted to run, but couldn’t. “Please let me go, or else.” “Or else what,” the furry thing said in a playful voice. “Who are you? Let me go!” insisted James.

“Oh, I assure you that you may go whenever you like,” said the thing with the deep voice and the orange, furry face. When James sat up and adjusted his eyes, he could

hardly believe what he was seeing. A regal tiger, with muscles upon his muscles, sat right next to him, quiet, strong, and with kind, playful eyes. Now, we all know that children should not talk with fierce tigers, but this is different. Sancti is a special story-tiger and James is a special story-boy. If we did not say that to you, some of your parents might think that James was doing a dangerous thing. “What zoo have you escaped from?” James wanted to know. The tiger laughed. “No zoo can hold me. I am free.”

“Then why are you here?” James needed to know. “For the same reason you are here,” replied the tiger. James thought that the tiger must have wanted a rest and needed a safe place to do that.

For the longest time, James and the tiger said nothing at all to each other. They just sat there together, feeling the sun’s warmth on their backs, and watching the world go by. There goes Mrs. Felzer with her little Doberman dog. She always seems to go out of her way to choose a funny-looking hat. Now, here comes Johnny Bechley, the one who is always borrowing James’ football and not returning it. James did not even want to look when he saw Brian, who tripped him, walking along the sidewalk. But, none of this mattered because James was in the grass with a furry-faced tiger and he felt right at home. Brian could not hurt him now, not while he was in the grass with a man-eating tiger! It never dawned on James that if the tiger were one of those man-eaters, then James was going to be dinner. No, he felt that the tiger was there to protect him against all the world.

After the longest time, James asked, “Shouldn’t we be properly introduced?” “Yes, I suppose that we should,” said the tiger. “My name is Sancti, and yours?” “I’m

James and I live right there in that big two story house.” As James peered through the grass, he could see the steeply sloped roof and his bedroom window with the one small tear in the curtain on the left side. “I have never lived in a house,” said Sancti. “I suppose that it is positively wonderful to have your own bed and to be able to go to the refrigerator whenever you want to get a cold drink,” the tiger said with a kind of longing for the predictable life that living in a home can bring. “I suppose,” said James, “but it can be pretty hard at times. My Dad has a temper and yells and my mom sometimes yells right back at him. And then there is my sister, Brigid, who makes fun of me.”

Sancti knew that comfort is not the same as happiness and that James had the comfort but not the happiness. The tiger was confident that if his friend continued to come to the tall grass that the happiness eventually might come to James, too.

When it was time to go, James didn’t want to leave. “I’ll just stay here with you,” James said slowly just to see what Sancti would say. “Well,” said the tiger in his quiet way, “if you stay here, in a year or two your toes will poke right through the front of your shoes as you grow.” “I don’t need shoes,” James reasoned. “After all, I’m in the squishy grass with you.”

“If you stay here,” challenged the tiger, “you won’t learn things in school about the world. Without going to school, you will never learn what the capitol of Vermont is. You know that you don’t know the capitol of Vermont.”

“I don’t plan to go there any time soon, thank you,” James clarified for him.

“Do you plan to ever eat spaghetti again?” asked Sancti.

“Oh, of course, I like spaghetti far too much to do without that,” James replied.

“Then I think that you will have to put your shoes on and go to the dinner table so that you can have your spaghetti. As you can see, we do not have the necessary appliances, plates, or utensils to have such a fine meal here in the grass,” said Sancti.

“OK, but may I come back tomorrow?” James asked with pleading eyes. “But of course. You are always welcome here,” Sancti said in his warm and reassuring way.

“Then I’ll see you tomorrow,” James said with a joy and confidence that he had almost forgotten he could feel.

Chapter 2

Night

As the family gathered around the dinner table, James couldn't wait to tell Brigid of his adventure. He could see that his sister was tense, probably from the argument that she had with Dad in the afternoon. But first, he needed one of those meatballs that were staring back at him from the steaming bowl. James was so hungry that he did not even care right now that his Dad was again grumpy, finding fault with the spaghetti sauce on James' cheek, and Brigid's slouching, and a few other things. It did not help that it was now raining. I hope that Sancti is not getting too wet, James thought.

When they were alone in the living room, James sat down in the old rocking chair, the one with the broken spring poking up into the seat padding. He scooted a little to the left to avoid the spring. Brigid sat back on the sofa and leaned back so far that James thought that Dad might yell at her for slouching again if he walked into the room, but he didn't. James gave a quick glance at his sister to be sure she was in a good mood. He did not want to let the secret out unless she was happy. Otherwise, she might laugh or even tell Dad, and James wanted neither of those things. After a few minutes, he got up the courage and told his sister of Sancti and how they are now friends. As you can imagine, Brigid stopped her slouching, sat up straight as can be and just looked at James. She could tell by his eyes that he was not joking. She hoped he was just fooling so she would not have to think that he had lost his mind, but she was not in a mood to make him feel badly. So, instead of telling him that he was crazy, she simply told James that he had too

much of an imagination and was making the whole thing up. “Come with me tomorrow and I’ll show you,” he said. She thought that it was just a waste of time, but the thought of sitting quietly in the tall grass, especially if the day was sunny, sounded good. “Sure, I’ll go with you,” she answered.

Once Brigid returned to her relaxed slouch on the sofa, James asked, “What was Dad yelling about today?” as he quickly glanced out the living room window toward the tall grass patch. “I’m still not sure. He asked me to pick up my toys and books. I didn’t say anything because I had planned to go to Sue’s house. I promised her. Dad told me that I just didn’t care, but I do.” That made James slouch, not because he was relaxed, but because what Brigid said made him sad. Neither one of them had much to say to each other after that. So, they just sat there, James thinking about Sancti and Brigid thinking about Dad, which made her slouch all the more. Both felt tired. James couldn’t tell if he was now so tired because he was sad or because of the exciting day he had with Sancti. No matter, for it was bedtime.

In bed for the night, James felt the cool breeze of the mid-September night come through the window and ride upon his sheets. Being on the second floor put him right on the level of the leaves. He could see the full moon that seemed to light up the night making the leaves shimmer and dance. The deer will be out tonight, James thought, recalling his mother’s wisdom on the matter: Whenever it was bright out at night, the deer came out to feed and play. He became very still so that he could hear the symphony of the crickets, who seemed to grow louder each day as the summer gave way to fall. If he listened lightheartedly enough, he could hear a tune in the crickets’ chirping. “And

don't you come back no more, no more" he heard and smiled. It all seemed so perfect.

For the first time in so long, he felt safe at home. His tall-grass patch was right below his window, across the driveway, and Sancti was there, just in case he needed him. And how did Sancti know that we were having spaghetti, James pondered as he drifted peacefully off to sleep.

Chapter 3

Brigid Meets Sancti

“Come on, and be sure no one sees you,” James explained as he and Brigid hurried into the tall grass. Their hideout would not be much of a hideout if everyone in the neighborhood saw them go in. “OK, here I am. So, where is this vicious tiger you said was in here,” Brigid asked as she looked around. She knows that she said the tiger was make-believe, and she still thinks it all is, but one never knows. She looked and looked. No tiger. She was right all along.

As she stretched out to feel the warmth of the sun on her face, Brigid felt a slight brush against her right cheek. “Stop it, James, I want to just lie here and soak up the sun.” Another brush of her cheek. This time, Brigid swung her left fist in the direction of the brush and hit something soft and hard at the same time. As she bounded up, her nose rested squarely on Sancti’s nose. “Well, hello, Brigid,” the tiger said in his playful way. Still pressing her nose to his, Brigid said humbly, “Oh...hello, Sancti. How did you know my name?”

“How did you know mine?” Sancti asked. “James told me all about you last night,” Brigid said sheepishly. Meeting a tiger in the tall grass was not as scary as she had at first thought. While she did not feel scared, she did feel a kind of awe. At the same time, she felt safe.

For a while, the three just sat together, enjoying the peace of their grassy hideaway and the sun that was streaming in through the top of the grass, warming them. Sancti broke the silence: “I heard you crying yesterday.”

That was all the tiger had to say for Brigid to well up with tears. She recalled her Dad's gruff voice and his scolding her for not caring. "Your Dad can be a bit rough, can't he?" Sancti said in his comforting way. Brigid shed a little tear and shook her head "yes." She put her head onto Sancti's right shoulder as he nuzzled his chin into her hair.

"Your Dad is not a bad person," Sancti said. "Oh, I know that," Brigid replied through her tears. "He just doesn't understand me and that makes me so mad."

"Your Dad is actually a very good person," Sancti said and then looked at both Brigid and James for their response. Both had blank stares and confused looks. "He is a person of worth. Do you know what that is?"

"Do you know where your Dad grew up and what he faced?" Sancti asked. "No", both replied at the same time. "He doesn't talk much about himself," James said.

"Well, let me fill you in. Your Dad's Dad came to this country from another country far across the ocean. Your Dad's Dad had to take a job unloading freight train cars here because he could not get the same job that he had as a teacher in the old country. Every night he would come home tired, with pains in his back, and he would go out after dinner to get a little extra money for the family by helping people light their charcoal stoves. He was an angry man because no one would hire him as a teacher, and he was a good teacher. So, he became bitter. Your Dad got yelled at a lot by his Dad, who was unhappy."

Both children sat in silence. They had never heard this story before. "It's hard to think of Dad as a little kid," said Brigid. "Oh, yes," said Sancti, "he was a little kid and he felt even smaller and of less importance than he was because his own Dad was mad

and whenever the pain in his back got really bad, he would yell the most. Sometimes your Dad would just hug and hug his teddy bear at night because he was so sad. He grew up thinking that he was not worth so much. If he was worth something, he thought, then his Dad would not be so harsh with him.”

“But, it wasn’t his fault that his Dad had a sore back,” Brigid said, surprising herself that she was taking her Dad’s side.

“That’s right,” Sancti said in his calm voice, “but he was too young to know that at the time. I don’t think that he knows it even now.”

“You mean, our Dad is still hurt by what happened to him when he was 11-years-old?” James wanted to know.

“Yes, of course,” Sancti instructed. “He has a hurt deep inside of him. When he hurts, he yells. Where do you think he learned that?”

“He learned it from his own Dad, didn’t he?” asked Brigid.

“Yes. He had love taken out of him a long time ago,” explained Sancti.

At that moment, Mom called the children in for the evening.

Chapter 4

Dinner Time Again

Dad came to the dinner table and did not look at anyone. It was a hard day, the kind of day that makes your belly feel like it is a pretzel, all twisted up inside. Both children kept their heads down and looked up with their eyes without moving their heads for fear that their father would see them looking at him. It didn't matter anyway because Dad was not paying attention to them. He was paying attention to the twisty pretzel in his tummy. It made his forehead look a little twisty, too, as the lines on his face pointed downward. It was as if the wrinkles on his forehead were formed into a frown.

"I'll bet that his frowning forehead is a part of the love that was taken out of Dad a long time ago," James thought as he buried his face next to his mashed potatoes so he would not be found out as he spied his father.

Brigid noticed that her Dad's mouth curled down a bit, like a frown that doesn't go away. She, too, thought of the love he lost as a child. Sancti said that Dad has worth, as much worth as anyone else. It's just that some people can't see that worth because they look in the wrong place, such as Dad's frowning forehead or curled-down lips, she thought. Dad has worth, she thought.

In the evening, Brigid sat at the living room window and watched the white-lace curtains sway with the breeze as she looked beyond to the tall-grass patch. It was still and quite. High in the sky, with its brush-strokes of red and purple, she could see a flock of Canadian geese, dutifully flapping their wings all together as they somehow managed to stay in their familiar "V" formation. Sancti must be asleep by now, she thought. She

thought of her Dad and was not angry with him at all now. She did not like that he made her cry yesterday, but she did understand him much better now. When she thought of the love taken from him as a boy, her heart felt warm.

Before going to bed, she got up from her place by the window and sat in her favorite spot on the sofa. She looked over at Dad, who was in his chair by the door. He was so busy reading the evening newspaper that he was not even aware that Brigid was in the room. The only light was from the standing floor lamp in back of Dad. It shown onto his head and made his face look dark. That was fine with Brigid, because she did not want to see the little frown lines at the corners of his mouth just now. Her thoughts were interrupted by the sound of more geese making their way south for the winter. With a small sigh, she got up from her comfortable place, walked slowly over to Dad and gently placed a kiss on his cheek. She had not done that for a long time. He smiled and his faced didn't seem at all pinched right then. "I'm sorry," he said in a whisper. Brigid smiled back.

Her bed felt particularly snug that night. I wonder how Sancti knew so much about Dad, she wondered, as she drifted off to sleep.

Chapter 5

School Awaits

“Time to get ready for school,” Mom called up to the children who were busily getting ready for the day. James was in no hurry. He combed his hair and then combed it a little more. He was about to go downstairs, when he reversed direction, went to his bedroom window, and looked down to the bluestem. The tops of the grass were in full bloom and so he could not see deep down into the patch. I guess it’s time to go, he thought. He was not so fond of school lately, what with the math tests where you need three hands to do all of the counting rather than only two hands as in fourth grade. Besides this, he did not want to eat one more bologna sandwich, which he was sure his Mom had made for lunch. As he kissed his Mom, he went through the living room, out the front door, and down the steps, being sure to avoid the big crack in the step nearest the ground. He tripped over that one last week.

Before he headed for school, James wanted a little time in the grass patch, so he made a quick left turn as he reached the driveway, looked back to make sure no one saw him, and then took a sharp right turn and crawled into the patch. His knees got a little dirty, but he figured that most of it would come off before he got to school. As he looked up from eyeing his knees, there was Sancti, stretching and yawning, seemingly unaware of James’ presence. “My, don’t we sleep late on school days,” James kidded.

“Thank you very much for that, but I do not go to school now, you know. I passed fifth grade some time ago.”

James rolled up his jacket and used it as a pillow as he put his head back and gazed up at the big, puffy clouds right above him. It always felt so safe and good to be in the tall grass with Sancti.

“What will you do in school today?” Sancti asked.

“Oh, probably the same old stuff. We may have a math test and I hope we don’t because I don’t get it. It’s too hard right now.”

“Be sure to eat your bologna sandwich. Your Mom wants you to grow big and strong,” Sancti said.

“I don’t really care if I don’t grow one inch more if it means one more of those sandwiches,” James said with a squished face.

“What will you do about Brian today?” Sancti asked.

James froze at those words. Whenever Brian was mentioned to James it reminded him of being tripped and he did not like to be tripped, especially by Brian, who has such a mean streak in him. “What do you mean?” James wanted to know.

“He is going to try to trip you again. This time it will be at the lunch recess, when you are going back to the classroom.”

“Oh, no. Not again. I’m going to be ready for him this time. He will walk out of school with the blackest eye anyone has ever seen. Thank you, Sancti, for letting me know and having a chance to cream that guy,” James said with courage and anger.

“You may be surprised to hear this,” said Sancti, “but I did not tell you that so you can have the first strike. I said it so that you can try something entirely different today.”

James was not so sure he wanted to hear what was coming next. “I told you so that you can avoid being where Brian is at the end of lunch and so you can help him with his geography lesson in the early afternoon.” This, of course, made James as angry as a stirred-up bumble bee.

“You can just forget about it, Sancti,” James shouted as his eyes flashed with fury.

“What is so terrible about helping him?” Sancti wanted to know.

“Terrible? I’ll tell you about terrible. I am not some weakling who will let Brian walk all over me. I have rights and fists and I plan to exercise my rights with my fists!”

“Is that as strong as you can be?” Sancti wanted to know.

“What do you mean?” now James wanted to know.

“I’m wondering, if you truly are as strong as you think, if using your fists is a stronger position than helping Brian when he needs help.”

“How can my helping him be a sign of strength and not weakness? Brian will know that I am afraid of him. He will know that I need to help him so that he does not hurt me,” James explained.

“Are you afraid of him?”

“No, I’m not. I already told you that I am ready to show him that through my fists.”

“If you are not afraid of him, then how can helping him be a sign of fear?”

James was getting all confused. “Well, then, I guess my helping him is not a sign of fear.”

“What is it, then?”

“If I help him, and I’m not saying that I am going to, then it would be a sign that I am bigger than Brian’s nastiness.”

“How does it make you bigger than his nastiness?”

“I guess this way: I won’t let his nastiness get in the way of my helping a nasty person in need. That is not so easy to do,” James said and he was feeling pretty good about himself for even saying this. “Did I really say this?” he thought. But, the thought did seem to be a reasonable one while in the tall grass with Sancti. He was not sure it would still seem so good when he saw that nasty Brian soon. Soon? Oh, no, he thought. I’m late! And with that thought, James bolted up and ran all the way to school.

Chapter 6

James Helps Brian

Chapter 6 is the shortest one in the whole book. This is so because it all worked out, just as James and Sancti had discussed. Right after lunch, Brian was standing exactly where Sancti said he would stand and his eyes had that I'm-going-to-trip-someone look. James cleverly avoided being where Brian was standing and so he did not get the satisfaction of tripping James. In early afternoon, James, true to his word to Sancti, helped Brian learn about the kinds of products produced in Madagascar and Brian left school with his jaw dropped way open. He could not understand why James would do such a thing as help him learn about Madagascar. From that day forward, he was never exactly like he was before, not quite so mean, not quite so feared. He even asked James on Thursday to be on his team as they chose up sides for the football game at recess.

As for James, he left school that day with a spring in his step. As he reached home, he took a sharp right into the driveway, looked around to see who might be around, then took another sharp right into the tall grass patch where he told Sancti all about his day.

Chapter 7

The Rip in the Wallpaper

How is it possible that so good a day can turn into so bad a night? Here was James, basking in the triumphs of the day, and now here is Brigid kicking him under the table. As James whirled around to answer Brigid's kick with a swift one of his own, he lost his balance, slipped over the edge of the chair, and tumbled to the floor as the chair flew backwards, putting a rip in the dining room wallpaper. This was no ordinary wallpaper, but special ordered through a fancy catalogue, the kind that costs you money and time alone in your room.

Of course, James was blamed for the whole thing and Brigid sat with the most innocent look on her face. Inside, she was laughing quite hard, but outside, she had the look of an innocent angel. As James was led away by the hand by his Mom, going straight to his room, he looked back with a scowl.

Brigid did feel badly that she played a part in James' imprisonment in his room. Even though Mom and Dad did not view it as time in prison, Brigid and James thought of it as so. For the rest of the night, James stayed in his room. For a while, he lay on his bed and looked up at the ceiling. He pretended that he had magical feet, the kind that can walk up walls and onto the ceiling without falling off. He pictured himself stepping over the light in the middle of the ceiling and pretended to sit on a chair pointing downward into the room. If it were up to him, he would put his bed right up there in the corner, so he doesn't trip on the light fixture if we should get up in the middle of the night for a glass of water. It is kind of funny, James thought. Sancti thinks like I am thinking now. He

always seems to turn things on their heads so that Brigid and I are able to see the world differently.

As for Brigid, she went up to her room early. She gazed out the window and down to the tall-grass patch. “Good night, Sancti,” she called. She could see the grass wave gently, first this way and then that. It is Sancti wishing me a good night, she thought.

Chapter 8

No More, No More

Today was Saturday, the kind of Saturday when you want to fill your pockets with all of the necessities of life, like a few football cards, a 25 cent piece, and some bubble gum. Being so well prepared for life, James was off to meet his friends. Brigid looked carefully at herself in the mirror and finished straightening her sweater. She was a bit worried about meeting up with James this day because of his imprisonment last night. She knew she started it and it did not feel so very good today.

She was lucky, though. As she made her way downstairs, James was ahead of her. I'll go along slowly so he can leave before I do, Brigid thought. And she did give him plenty of room. And James did leave before she did. And James was quite a ways from her as she passed by the driveway. And then Sancti called to both of them.

Can't I just run away now, Brigid thought. But it was far too late for such escapes. James heard Sancti's call and spun around, only to be met by the embarrassed Brigid. "Oh, it's the kickboxer," James said with a cold expression. Brigid did not answer.

"Come, children," Sancti welcomed. "I have some warm scones here in the grass. Come." Both children sat down, but James was not so happy to be there. He had to face Brigid and he had to face the fact that as he sat down, he put big wrinkles into his prized football cards that he placed in his back pocket only a few minutes ago. This Saturday is not so great, James thought.

He slowly changed his mind as he bit into a buttery scone. It reminded him of his grandmother's baking before she passed away two years ago. Grandma was just the best, he thought. He wondered how she managed to stay so cheerful and happy all of those years when Grandpa was so grumpy and in pain from lifting those heavy boxes at the freight yard. I wonder if she knew Sancti, he thought. Sancti watched both children with a certain glee. He so loved to see children warm up their tummies and their hearts.

Sancti settled down right next to the children so that they felt safe and loved. "I know that you know all about your Dad's worth. He had love taken from him as a child and that melted your hearts to learn that. I now want each of you to know that you, too, are of great worth."

"Both of you have been hurt. Your 'kickboxing' as James calls it and your readiness to make fun of him so often comes out of your hurt. And you, James, your readiness to swing with your fists at whatever moves, that, too, is part of your hurt. You see," Sancti said, "you are not so different from your Dad, who had love taken from him so long ago."

Both stopped eating the scones because their tummies were feeling like a pretzel now.

"You both need to be filled up more with love to replace what was taken out of you," Sancti explained. "Did you know, Brigid, that if you are kind and respectful to James that this helps fill him up? It is the same for you, James. Brigid needs you."

The children looked at each other. They smiled at each other, just like Brigid and Dad did the other night. They understood. Sancti did not have to say any more on the matter.

Chapter 9

All the Rest of Their Days

It would be silly of me, after you read almost the whole book, to say to you that Brigid and James were always so wonderful to each other from that point on. It just does not work that way in the world, even in the world of special story people and tigers. What changed is this: Both of their hearts turned softer, warmer, and kinder than before they met Sancti. They knew that they could help each other's hearts to stay soft by seeing their worth, responding kindly. They did this, too, for the rest of the family.

As for Dad, he started to forgive his own Dad for having a sore back and for making him hug and hug his teddy bear at night so very long ago when he was young. He said he was sorry again, this time to both James and Brigid. They all started to try harder to fill each other up with love. Dad started paying more attention to his growing children rather than to that pretzel twisting his tummy. In fact, his tummy became less and less twisty as his heart changed. Mom was glad.

As for the two children, they tried to help each other in life. Soon after their last visit with Sancti, when he told them about worth, and kindness, and respect, James was looking out the living room window just as the day was saying hello to the night. All of a

sudden, hundreds of migrating birds began to fly right over the tall-grass patch. Even though they were not getting on so well that day, James quickly called to Brigid, who sat right by the window with him and watched as the birds came, not by the hundreds, but now by the thousands. They covered the sky. Brigid noticed the contrast between the color of the silhouetted birds high overhead and the bright orange and red colors of the autumn leaves. Some of the birds gathered in the bluestem patch for the night. Others went into the woods to join the deer, while others kept going, perhaps to catch up to the geese making their way south.

Both of the children sat quietly, opened the window, and listened as the song of the birds filled their home. It became a song that stayed in their hearts for the rest of their days. James, as Sancti predicted, did outgrow his shoes. Brigid went on to college. Sancti did not actually leave them once they grew up because he continued to live in their hearts, just like the song of the birds did. Brigid and James stayed close to each other by exchanging letters and telephone calls. As grown people, they tried to bring what they now call the “Sancti sense” to their own families. As their own children grew, they were filled with kindness, respect, generosity, and love, just like Sancti taught so long ago.