

The Legend of the 'North Pond Hermit'

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For years, citizens around the area of Rome, Maine, have only jokingly blamed the 'North Pond Hermit', whenever possessions mysteriously vanished around their camps. They attributed the losses to a mythical man who no one had ever seen nor heard. However, after avoiding authorities for over a quarter of a century, the elusive man of local legend has finally been apprehended, much to the surprise of residents. While some are angry with the hermit for the crimes he committed over the years, others venerate him as a folk hero. Although his story is shrouded in mystery, authorities are gradually learning more about him by speaking with those who knew him years ago and talking to the fabled hermit himself.



The North Pond Hermit, Christopher Knight, is originally from Albion, Maine. According to people who knew him years ago, he spent his school years not doing anything noteworthy. Those who knew him earlier in life claimed he was a very smart, yet unremarkable individual. In high school, he did not have many friends but did not have any adversaries either (Associated Press, 2013). No source claimed to notice any odd behavior that could signify a harmful mental condition. Some believe the death of a cousin may have spurred his desire to be isolated from society. Others claim that, after the death of his father and the tragedy of Chernobyl, he decided to leave (Curtis, 2013). Even Knight himself seemed to not know the exact reason he left. There were no significant signs that Knight would one day march off into the wilderness alone, just two years after he graduated high school in 1986 (Curtis 2013). To old classmates and authorities, Knight is a conundrum.

Although Knight's camp was called "makeshift" by multiple sources, it was quite sophisticated. According to journalist Craig Crosby (2013), "He built a hut on a slope in the woods" (para. 10). His tent was facing in a direction at which he could best utilize the sunlight at all hours of the day in order to keep as warm as possible. He concealed his camp by covering any



bright and shiny objects with dark colored tarps and bags, as well as moss. He also never lit a fire, as to further hide his whereabouts. The methods he used to veil his camp resemble military tactics, although he was never in the military. Despite the primitive look of his camp, Knight strategically masked his location to maintain his way of life (Crosby, 2013).

During the years he spent in the wild, Knight filled his time with hobbies and important tasks for his survival. Crosby (2013) writes that “he spent his days reading books and meditating” (para. 7). He also watched plants grow. However, more important to Knight’s story was the startling amount of crime he committed over the time he lived in the wilderness. Knight claims to have stolen from around 300 campsites. He burglarized these campsites over 1,000 times in order to obtain the supplies and food he needed to survive (Curtis, 2013). Journalist Glenn Adams (2013) writes, “‘He used us like his local Walmart,’ said Harvey Chesley, the [Pine Tree] camp's facilities manager” (para. 1). Some people who lived in the area claimed that they knew about Knight’s crimes for years and even left out food for him. However, after many years, Knight’s crimes have reached an end.

The Pine Tree Camp, a camp for people with special needs, was burglarized multiple times, until finally camp leaders asked authorities to investigate. Sergeant Terry Hughes had the idea to set up a camera and a trip wire alarm system that would notify him at home if someone came into the Pine Tree Camp dining facility to steal food at night after it was closed. Late at night, after the alarm system was assembled that day, Knight hit the trip wire. Hughes heard the signal and then saw Knight on camera. He quickly arrived at the camp and apprehended Knight (Crosby, 2013). Knight was found, not disheveled and dirty, as television and films often portray men who live alone in the wild, but he had a close-cut beard and short hair. He was also still



wearing 1980's-style "aviator" glasses (Crosby, 2013). Hughes was the first person Knight spoke with since the 1990's, when he walked passed somebody on a path and greeted him.

Since Knight's apprehension, he has been adjusting to life in jail. He was also interviewed about his actions and motives. Hughes reported that Knight acknowledged his actions were wrong and even appeared to show "shame and remorse" (Crosby, 2013). Despite confessing to over 1,000 robberies, Knight will only be tried for the burglary for which he was caught. "The 47-year-old hermit now awaits his future at the Kennebec County Jail, where he is being held in lieu of \$5,000 cash bail on charges of burglary and theft." (Crosby, 2013, para. 5). Meanwhile, according to writer Bill Chappell (2013), while in jail, Knight received an offer to pay his bail from a nonresident, as well as a marriage proposal from another individual—both of which he refused.



The public continues to have mixed feelings about the case. Although the people Knight stole from are furious that he was able to elude punishment for all of the crime he has committed over the years, old friends of his are raising money to help support him when he leaves jail (Associated Press, 2013). Knight is even being revered as a hero of sorts, by others. Stan Keach, a bluegrass artist from Belgrade, Maine, has written a song about Knight, called "We Don't Know the North Pond Hermit" (Burnham, 2013). In the song, Keach sings of Knight's life alone in the wild.



Nobody has a clear idea of why so many years ago a young man decided to separate himself from society. The facts surrounding the events are hazy, and the story itself has the characteristics of folklore. As time progresses, more of Knight's story will be revealed. In the meantime, people will continue to speculate about who the North Pond Hermit really is, as he tries to answer that question himself.

## References

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