

"Musings"

A Musing ~ "On Being in Love"

It is said that "We protect what we love!" If you take a moment to reflect on what that means in your own life, you'll quickly realize the truth in that statement. We immediately picture our "loved ones"...spouses, children, grandchildren, parents, dear friends...those for whom we say we would "give our life to protect". Reflecting beyond that, it would become clear there are other "things that we love"; things that we would find it difficult to "live without". For me, that has meant the "falling in love" with the lakes and forests of our northwoods environment. This special kind of "falling in love", at a very young age, can feed one's soul throughout life. Where does it all begin? Who nurtures that "love"?

Each of us can tell stories of the early experiences in nature that laid the foundation for our own "love of the lakes". My parents began vacationing on Bony Lake in the mid-30s. As soon as my brother, Bob, and I were old enough to join them on their annual two-week visits to Bony Lake, they packed us (and our dog, Scrappy) into the back seat of the old Nash, which had been transformed into a bed, for the 12-hour drive from Berwyn, IL to Barnes. When we'd get to Hayward about 11 am, Dad would first visit the lockers in the basement of Angler's Bar to "check out" the fish that were being caught, and then ask if "the road up to Barnes was open", as the sand roads back then were often rain-soaked and "iffy" to say the least. The first thing I always cherished, when we finally opened the car doors at the resort, was the "incredible smell of the pines". It was a sign that we had "arrived" in this amazing place. My parents nurtured our "love of the lakes and outdoors" in so many ways; but they also modeled what it meant to "love being in nature". They encouraged us to spend endless hours "playing at the lake"...catching frogs that were so abundant in the late 1940s that you had to watch where you stepped, collecting piles of clams in the shallows in the evening so we could follow "their tracks" in the morning sand, learning to "drive" the 5 hp Johnson motor on the wooden 4-seater boat that came with our resort cabin; and fishing for LONG hours with Mom, Dad, my brother, and our dog, Scrappy! Our night trips were a true adventure ~ pillows were a must so we could fall asleep under the stars in the bottom of the boat! They were lovely days...swimming in the afternoons, learning to canoe, first efforts to waterski...and the evening entertainment was truly amazing! Dad would pop a huge bowl of popcorn (using his long-handled, screen popper over the 2-burner gas "cook stove" that came with our cottage) and then we'd pile into the car for the short drive to "the dump" to watch the bears come in for their "evening Happy Hour"! It was delightful!

Although it is true that many things have changed over the years; e.g., you can't drink the lake water any more; at least 2/3 of the lily pads are gone; the frogs and clams are few and far between [but making a comeback, of sorts]; and, of course, the "fishing just isn't like it used to be", I also know that many of us are "still in love" with the things that brought us here in the first place. The beauty, the serenity, the loon songs, the sunlight on ripples, the laughing of children as they delight in "the lakes and all the critters" who inhabit the shorelands, remain "incredible draws" to this magical place.

While it is true that we CAN "love our lakes" to death, it is also true that we now have the science and experience to understand that lakes are a diverse and complex, and often fragile, natural system. RESTORING them to "health" is much more difficult (and costly) than PRESERVING and PROTECTING their "good health" in the first place. Negative impacts are CUMULATIVE in their effects and seemingly small changes (20 ft of shoreline lost, gallons of run-off added) can add up, and soon a degraded environment becomes accepted as the "new normal", and a new generation goes on from there. But it isn't inevitable ...we CAN make a difference. Fortunately, POSITIVE impacts are also cumulative! The small shoreline restorations, the small changes in behavior and use patterns, the improvements in upland drainage and near-shore habitats that EACH of us make DO ADD UP toward our goal of restoring and preserving the health of our lake ecosystems.

I like the "pebble in the pond" analogy: The "ripples" that each of us make when we "take the 'restoration' plunge" can expand our sphere of influence...and increase the likelihood that those around us will join us "in the pond". While making BIG WAVES on lakes can have lasting negative effects on shorelines, "MAKING WAVES" to "stir the pot" and get people moving is a GOOD THING. After all, none of us find a STAGNANT POND inviting, do we??

I'm sure we all HOPE that our great, great, great grandkids will ALL "fall in love" with our lakes and forests; and, more importantly, that they, in turn, will become dedicated "stewards" of all that we have come to love. Our best chance of that happening will be to IMMERSE our young people in early, joyful, hands-on experiences in nature and to INSPIRE them to cherish the natural environment and advocate for its long, healthy life!!

As Margaret Meade once said: "Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed citizens can change the world; indeed it's the only thing that ever has!"

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