



Musing

February 2022 - "Calls of the Wild"

Anne Torrey, Lower Eau Claire Lake

Although the deepest, darkest, coldest part of winter has begun to wane, the isolation of living in the Northwoods continues to prevail over those who revel in her stillness. That stillness, and the beauty that presides over it, is what keeps me entranced with my life in my magical forest. It is easy to move out of solitude, but not so easy to find it. I count myself lucky a thousand times over for being able to live here even through harshest of weather and subzero nights.

Take, for example, my experiences of a day not long ago....

I was up early, much before dawn, to a bitterly cold morning – 24 below zero. A bit chilly yet to walk the dog so I pattered to the kitchen, grabbed a cup of tea and went upstairs to work for a bit. By 9:00 the mercury was above zero, so I threw on my long down coat, scarf, headband, and mittens, and went out for our morning walk. As we trod up the road, the swishing of my coat made it difficult to hear what was happening outside, so as I often do, I stopped in the middle of the road, just to listen. The stillness was almost overwhelming, not even a sigh of wind to rustle the crumbling oak leaves still clinging tenuously to the branches. The sun was struggling to make its way up the tree line, golden rays beaming through the pines, causing the snow to glitter as though Jack Frost had just come through with a fresh dusting. So still, so quiet. Even Tug stopped and cocked his head, trying to hear anything that might be out there. The silent world suddenly erupted with the harsh cawing of a dozen crows. They had been hiding in the trees, sleeping their way through the cold night. Our presence was obviously a disruption and they let all their friends know to look out for the interlopers! Not wanting to disturb them further, we marched on, swish, swish, swish...stop. Again, complete stillness. My eyes traveled slowly across the road, taking in the fresh snow, the little tracks of the neighborhood fox as well as the remnants of last night's dinner (poor bunny!). Wait. What was that!?? A large shadow flew over us and into the woods on the far side of the road. EHEHEHEHEH!!! What sounded like a shrieking chimpanzee broke the beauty of the moment, causing my heart to palpitate quickly. Knowing that was impossible, we scoured the trees with our eyes, looking for the source of the loud abrasive noise. Taptaptaptaptaptap!! There it was... a primitive looking bird. It was huge, with a long spiky beak and a flaming red crown – a Pileated Woodpecker searching for breakfast in the tree right above us. He was magnificent, and I felt so fortunate to have this moment to observe him. We continued home where we were also fortunate to see and hear the Blue Jays, Finches and Grosbeaks chattering away at our feeders.

That evening, I looked out the window and noticed the snow glowing brightly. Unable to resist its otherworldly feel, I stepped out into the bitter cold, where the full moon lit up the night sky, illuminating the trees and reflecting off the snow, creating beautiful silhouettes of the pines, their shadows causing the forest to double in density right before my very eyes. We stood there, gazing out at the frozen lake, appreciating the beauty and solitude of this special place, when a great moaning arose from beyond the shoreline. Rising in intensity, waning, then traveling to another side. Silence.... BOOM! CRACK!! Startling to say the least yet

mesmerizing in its suddenness and scope of range. As temperatures shift, so does the ice and when that happens, we are treated to a symphony of percussion, emanating from the depths of the frozen waters.

As we stood there, marveling at the sonorous reverberations I had literally felt in my chest, Tug's ears perked up, hearing something my ears were not sensitive enough to yet register. Wait, there it is, a howling, in the distance. Voices rising in the cold, moonlit sky, flowing over me, sending chills up my spine. Not one voice, but 2, 3... I began to lose count. Wolves, calling to gather their pack, perhaps? The howling traveled over the lake and echoed through the forest, encouraging my imagination to run wild, instilling a hearty respect for the creatures that make their way through life in nature as they were born to do. These beautiful animals, which mate for life, are dedicated to their pack and providing for their young. I know this howling keeps them together, united as a clan, and I am grateful to hear their voices in the wild.

We stood there a while longer until once again we were enveloped in silence. Gazing up at the enormous full moon and dazzling stars, I gave my thanks for all I had experienced that day, by the good grace of Mother Nature. She was not finished, however. I had yet to hear the finale, and as I made my way to the porch, there it was – hoo hoo hoo hooooo.....hoo hoo hoo hooooo..... two Great Horned Owls, very close by, calling to one another through the trees. Soothing last notes, a beautiful ending to what had been a very special day.

On this day, just for me, the creatures of the earth created their own music, combining with the consonance of the lake to create a symphony of the north, reminding me that this is the one, true thing in life. Nature. It is always there, has always been there, and is where we come from, where we live. Life up here, in the magnificent Northwoods is something to be treasured, respected and cared for. I am reminded of this every single day. Is there anything more to treasure, than the calls of the wild?