

Northern Lakes'

Soundings

Northern Lakes'

Soundings

— — — — —
No. 37

July, 2009
— — — — —

a gathering of stories, poems and essays
from northern Wisconsin

July, 2009



published by
the Northern Lakes Press

from Webster's Dictionary:

¹sounding n 1a: measurement by sounding b: the depth so ascertained c pl: a place or part of a body of water where a hand sounding line will reach bottom 2: measurement of atmospheric conditions at various heights 3: a probe, test, or sampling of opinion or intention

Contents

Learning To Dance by Carol Morfitt	3
The View from Windy Hill — Stormy Weather by Edward M. Moersfelder	4
Storm by Edward M. Moersfelder	8
Morning by Pat Hansen	9
from Echoes of Ancient Music by LaMoine MacLaughlin	10
Where Did Summer Go? by Jeanne Murphy	12
Two Short Poems by Jeanne Murphy	13
Discouragement by Ralph Weber	14
Midnight Love by Irene Christiansen	15
Reflections in a Morning Mirror by D.C.T. Hoffman	16

The Writers

Learning To Dance

By Carol Morfitt

I'm asking for wisdom to measure my days,
To grow with each new circumstance,
To gain new perspective and move with new grace;
You see, I'm just learning to dance.

I closely give heed to distinguish the beat,
The pattern to learn, and the stance,
Learn boundaries, freedom, to step on no toes;
Please be patient, I'm learning to dance.

Although I am eager to stomp, swing and twirl,
I need to learn all the new slants.
With practice, I know freedom really can come;
Believe me, I'm learning to dance.

Self consciousness hangs like a slow-fading cloud,
But this time it won't spoil my chance.
Past foibles and clumsy attempts come to mind,
Understand, I'm just learning to dance.

It steps on my shoelaces, drags at my skirt,
Makes me notice the displeasing glance.
But my heart and my soul override all of these,
And I just keep on learning to dance.

I love friends who join me in laughter or tears
When I fall on the seat of my pants.
I see that they all understand – or accept,
“It's like that when you're learning to dance.”

The View From Windy Hill—Stormy Weather

By Edward M. Moersfelder

By the end of February or early March I develop two cravings: A thick steak grilled over charcoal and a rousing thunderstorm. I prefer them both before the frost is out of the ground, but on a warmish humid early spring afternoon after the wood frogs begin to call. Now that red meat has been put right up there, after smoking and obesity, as a prime health risk factor, I take some satisfaction facing down the odds with a forkful of New York strip held up in the face of an approaching thunderstorm. At least the threat of being struck by lightning is only marginally greater than the danger of winning the lottery.

The first storm is normally the deep all gray variety with the thunder cell hidden inside, that begins to mutter and rumble in the distance and you have to listen a moment before you say, “Yeah, that’s thunder.” It happened this year a couple of weeks ago at 10:20 P.M.—flashes, thunder, not dramatic, but comforting as an early sign of spring. When it comes before the ground thaws, it brings to mind my Dad’s observation that a good thunderboomer will bring out the frost. Whether that’s true or not, it sounds right—it certainly brings me out.

Second only in excitement to the first thunderstorm of the season is the storm that ends a stretch of hot, sticky, nasty, summer weather. Late in the day convection currents of humid surface air rise and cool. Water droplets condense. Electricity flies between opposite charges within the cloud and on the ground. If the updraft is strong enough and the air inside the top of the cloud cold enough, the water drops freeze and are pushed back up, grow in size until their gravity overcomes the updraft and fall as hail. One of the summers I worked on Pete’s farm, Pete installed a barn cleaner. While Mr. Jensen was inside pouring and trowelling the concrete, I was outside with a pile of gravel, bags of Portland cement, an electric cement mixer, a water hose and a shovel—a great way to keep a kid out of mischief--and assure

a good night’s sleep. On a July afternoon, as I shoveled, I had a front-row seat to the meteorological drama playing itself out in the sky to the north. Against a deep blue background, a huge cumulonimbus thunderhead snaked its way higher and higher until its top was blown flat by the upper jet stream. Although it was miles away, I could see it boiling cloud out from within itself, blazing bright white in the afternoon sun--a slow motion dance that I can still see when I close my eyes.

If you are standing in the way when a storm like this comes in from the west, in front of the sun, and the sky turns green, you know there is trouble in the air. A couple of years back one of these came in on a late afternoon as Karel and I watched from the deck. I was reminded of the Robert Penn Warren short story “When the Light Gets Green.” In the story an old southern Civil War veteran who has lost his wealth in a tobacco shed fire is still drawn to the tobacco crops cultivated by his son-in-law. And he fears hail that will shred the crop. As his young grandson, the narrator, tells the story, a dry spell broke and a storm blew up. “It was mighty still, with lightning way off, so far you couldn’t hardly hear the thunder. Then the leaves began to ruffle like they do when the light gets green, and my grandfather said to me, “Son, it’s gonna hail.” When the light went green two years ago, it did just that. Up on the Hill, I always question the wisdom of our choice of building site when the wall cloud bears down, it gets deathly still, then the leaves begin to rustle and from far off comes the sound of rain pounding in the trees.

When I was very young on the farm in Marshfield and a storm would blow through in the night, I would wake my Dad and ask him if the old barn would go down. He always said, “No, it won’t,” though one morning we got up to find that the top of the barn had shifted three or four inches east on the foundation. In those storms the two old willow trees behind the garage would always shed branches, but never seemed much the worse for wear. In 1957 when my older sister and her husband, Ralph, visited the old farm, a storm blew up that triggered the ultimate

warning: “Everyone to the basement!” Ralph had served as flight engineer and top turret gunner on B-17s over Germany in World War II and had stood down Messerschmitt Bf 109s and Focke-Wulf Fw 190s with his .50 caliber guns. As I headed for cover I looked back to see him standing solidly in front of the window, his Cherokee-heritage nose and cheekbones set in firm profile against the flashes of the approaching storm. A little weather was not going to move him.

And one hot afternoon when I was in high school, what happened can only be explained, I suppose, by the invincibility of youth. As a thunderstorm bore down on the farm, I stripped off my clothes, blew out the door, streaked across the lawn and pounded up the dirt road in the driving rain, mud and water flying from under my bare feet. In the early sixties, there was not much traffic on Klondike Drive so I was not worried about being discovered. The risk of lightning, which was flashing all around, however, was another matter. By the time I made it to the top of the rise about a quarter mile west of the house, I reconsidered and decided that maybe it was time to head for cover. I cannot remember, however, when I have felt more a part of my surroundings--enveloped in water, noise and fire. For those minutes there was neither past nor future. It was all vividly right now. When I got back to the house my folks just smiled and shook their heads. I was the fourth and last child, born 22 years after my oldest sibling, and my parents were pretty much out of gas when it came to child rearing. Besides, what were they going to say? “You shouldn’t run naked in a thunderstorm?” Everyone knows that.

About that same time I read a book that I think was entitled “The Man Who rode the Thunder,” about a guy who bailed out of a military plane over a thunderhead and spent the next 45 minutes or so falling through the thunder, lightening, rain and hail within the storm and being dragged up by the vicious updrafts. By the end of his ordeal, which concluded, miraculously, with his parachute opening, he was beaten by wind, bruised by hail, and deafened by thunder. Although I had only run naked through a

storm, I felt kinship with this guy and a sense of the power that we cannot harness or turn back.

The essence of storms is their brute force and their inevitability. They will do what they will. In history and literature, the gale has been a foil to the ambitions of man and a focus to address his grievance with the gods. It was a gale that took down the Spanish Armada and saved Elizabeth’s England from certain defeat. It was heavy weather that provided cover for the allied fleet before the D-Day invasion of Normandy. It was the raging tempest into which Lear in Shakespeare’s tragedy threw himself to lament all the misfortunes that had been visited upon him:

Blow, winds, and crack your cheeks! Rage! Blow!
You cataracts and hurricanoes, spout
Till you have drenched our steeples, drowned the cocks!
You sulphurous and thought-executing fires,
Vaunt-couriers to oak-cleaving thunderbolts,
Singe my white head! And thou, all-shaking thunder,
Smite flat the thick rotundity o’ the world!
Rumble thy bellyful! Spit, fire! Spout, rain!

And Captain Dan, who lost his legs in Viet Nam, shakes his fist into the raging storm from the top of the mast on Forrest Gump’s shrimp boat and shouts above the wind “Is that the best you’ve got? Come on, bring it on!” While some may consider fascination with the power of storms foolhardy for what it might bring upon them, to do so assumes that what we think creates a cause and effect relationship with the weather. But when the storm clouds loom over Windy Hill, the wall cloud approaches and the light gets green, I cross my fingers, say “Karel, it’s gonna hail”-- and then pray that I have not offended the gods.

Storm

By Edward M. Moersfelder

Above the woods we see the boiling shroud,
Its top sheared off by pulsing jet stream gales—
The billowing, rising, living piles of cloud
That roll and pitch like east wind in the sails
Of ships that push to flee before a storm.
Though deep above there's trouble in the air,
A deathly calm cries "hold" to fears that form.
We know with certain truth it comes, we stare
Transfixed. We cannot stop this raging blow
But helpless wait to see how random fate
Or luck or destiny lead us to know
We fixed our place too early—or too late.
We hear the grey-green storm cloud writhe and shriek
And stand our ground, while moved, too awed to speak.

Morning

By Pat Hansen

I wake to a morning of dark clouds
And the sounds of distant thunder,
To a morning drenched with the night's rain
Like the world gone sad with tears.

But soon the sun bursts through
With all the colors of the spectrum
Vibrant and absolutely gorgeous,
Lightening the new day.

from Echoes of Ancient Music

By LaMoine MacLaughlin

from Part One: Revisiting the Walls of Troy

Leda

What special feature drew me to his sight?
Did he see some rare beauty in my face?
My eyes? My mouth? My willow waist? Some grace
About my slender ankles, lean and light?
Now I must tell my husband what occurred,
But will he say I bear some brutish thing?
What if I bear a queen? What if a king?
Will he forgive me? Will he find no word?
I do know this: one day deep in our wood
Strong wings swooped down upon me from afar
And as he slowly feathered through my thighs
My fingers held him, while within his eyes
I saw ten thousand flags unfurl for war
And all our universe awash with blood.

from Part Two: Where Odysseus Sailed

The Cyclops

So now I tend my sheep as if at night
And yet my careful fingers see them all;
Sometimes on hands and knees I have to crawl
From place to place with only touch for sight.
Considered popular, I once had friends,
But now none ever comes to visit me,
And I am known as one who cannot see;
My all-consuming nightmare never ends.
I view what happened as some dreadful dream,
A grief I try to push beyond my reach.
I rarely go to town; I rarely speak.
Instead I slowly stumble by this stream
Or wander aimlessly down by the beach
To sit alone while salt-spray wets my cheek.

Where Did Summer Go?

By Jeanne Murphy

The first hint that it was slipping away came from the swallows. Every day for weeks they gathered on the wires outside the windows for a pre-dawn visit. At first a dozen of our regular residents, then each day more came until we could count 30 or more. For the next two mornings they gathered and sat quietly on the wires, huddled together, making no sounds. They followed me into the meadow, scooping bugs from the air above my head. As I sat at the window having coffee they swooped by the window inches from my face, doing their finest aerobatics. They turned, chortled, posed and glided, fashion models showing off their new flight feathers. Later that day they were gone and the yard was desolate.

A few days after their leaving the season's first frost shocked us. Across the road a couple of maples exploded scarlet and gold among the dark oaks. Every day a little more yellow showed in the tops of the trees and in the ditches. Goldenrod blanketed the hillside, the sky became the clear azure of late summer with islands of lace edged clouds and the last rose petals scattered across the lawn. The school bus rolled by and daytime neighborhoods became deserted.

Number One Grandson is a senior this year. Last year he attained goal one: to be as tall as Grandma and to weigh the same. This year's goals are to get a car and to join the Air Force.

Number Two is a freshman and prefers a boombox to Dr. Seuss and the Muppets.

Number Three, stretching hard to catch up, spent the summer babysitting and helping his mom. The summer passed with no nature hikes, no canoe trips, no bonfires. We even missed our annual date with the Perseid Meteor Shower. The box of bird's nests, fungus and rocks, saved for Show and Tell, sits unclaimed on the back porch. "Gee, Grandma! Why don't you give that stuff to some LITTLE kid?" Ah, yes! Where did summer go?

Two Short Poems

By Jeanne Murphy

Dr. Spock

Oh, Dr. Spock is simply grand,
We really ought to heed him,
And when our kids are all grown up
We may find time to read him.

Old Charlie

Old Charlie's not one to get into a dither,
The cows can go dry and the crops can all wither.
While all of his neighbors with nature are grapplin'
He down by the brook will be fishin' and nappin'.
If you tell him he's shiftless he'll just yawn and grin,
It's little he owns but the clothes that he's in.
But still that I envy him I cannot hide,
If I had any sense I'd be there at his side.

Discouragement

By Ralph Weber

In seven years I will be seventy,
But what's in that? Is virtue length of days?
A hundred years won't make a saint of me;
In being so there must be other ways.
I wish a love of spring could bring release,
Because I feel a madman in a grave,
And tortured with a passion without peace
For buds that hold the perfume that I crave.
But let's be fair, I do a bit of good:
I tend the cats and send some aid away,
I hold a hand and listen to a word,
A little help at church—so what, I say?
Because I light a candle in the war
Will darkness still not fall, and all the more?

Midnight Love

By Irene Christiansen

Midnight blue with stars of grace
Are in your eyes and on your face.
The paths of life have marked your time
With handsomeness that speaks in rhyme.

Oh midnight love, though late to call,
You sear my soul and give your all.
With past loves lore, you hold me tight
And kiss my lips in rare moonlight.

Though on our mind is fear of dawn
That one of us may well be gone.
We make the most of time that's here,
And laugh away that mortal fear.

To feel alone in crowded rooms
With aching heart the future looms.
Along the edge of time we'll dance
And know we had this great romance.

The Writers

Reflections in a Morning Mirror

By D.C.T. Hoffman

A face appears in morning mirrors, I've seen it there before:
Same face again, same place again, ten thousand times or more.
It follows every move I make, reflecting every move I take,
And mimics everything I see, that's how I know it's me.

But his right hand is on my left, my left hand on his right.
Some other face, some other place, or just a trick of light?
If his right side is on my left, why not his bottom on my top?
I hesitate to think of that, my shaves would have to stop.

Carol Morfitt is Amery's most recent Poet Laureate. She appears here for the first time in Northern Lakes' *Soundings*.

Edward M. Moersfelder writes a regular column for *The Hometown Gazette* and has appeared in Northern Lakes' *Soundings* before. He lives in rural Amery.

Pat Hansen appears regularly in Northern Lakes' *Soundings*. She lives in Amery.

LaMoine MacLaughlin is editor of Northern Lakes' *Soundings*. He lives in rural Clayton.

Jeanne Murphy appears regularly, writing on a wide variety of topics, in Northern Lakes' *Soundings*. She lives in Amery.

Ralph Weber has published poems in recent issues of Northern Lakes' *Soundings*. He lives in Clear Lake.

Irene V. Christiansen has appeared in Northern Lakes' *Soundings* from its beginnings. She lives in Amery.

Don Hoffman has appeared in previous issues of Northern Lakes' *Soundings*. He lives in rural Amery.

Northern Lakes' *Soundings* is a collection of writing by members of the Northern Lakes Writers' Guild and is published periodically by the Northern Lakes Press at the Northern Lakes Center for the Arts, 113 Elm St., Amery, Wisconsin 54001.