

"IN WILDNESS IS THE PRESERVATION OF THE WORLD."

"I wish to speak a word for. . .wildness. . .to regard man as an inhabitant, or a part and parcel of Nature, rather than a member of society. I wish to make an extreme statement, if so I may make an emphatic one. . . .

"In Wildness is the preservation of the World. . . .From the forest and wilderness come the tonics and barks which brace mankind. . . . The story of Romulus and Remus being suckled by a wolf is not a meaningless fable. The founders of every state which has risen to eminence have drawn their nourishment and vigor from a similar wild source. It was because the children of the Empire were not suckled by the wolf that they were conquered and displaced by the children of the northern forests who were."

"The civilized man not only clears the land permanently to a great extent, and cultivates open fields, but he tames and cultivates to a certain extent the forest itself. By his mere presence, almost, he changes the nature of the trees as no other creature does. ~~The sun and air, and perhaps fire, have been introduced, and grain raised where it stands. It has lost its wild, damp, and shaggy look; and countless fallen and decaying trees are gone, and consequently that thick coat of moss which lived on them is gone too. The earth is comparatively bare and smooth and dry. . . .We seem to think that the earth must go through the ordeal of sheep-pasturage before it is habitable by man. . . .And what are we coming to. . .? We shall be obliged to import the timber . . .hereafter, or splice such sticks as we have. . .As if individual speculators were to be allowed to export the clouds out of the sky,~~

or the stars out of the firmament, one by one. We shall be reduced to gnaw the very crust of the earth for nutriment."

"In society you will not find health, but in nature. . . Society is always diseased, and the best is the most so. There is no scent in it so wholesome as that of the pines, nor any fragrance so penetrating and restorative as the life-everlasting in high pastures."

"We need the tonic of wildness,--to wade sometimes in marshes where the bittern and the meadow-hen lurk, and hear the booming of the snipe; to smell the whispering sedge where only some wilder and more solitary fowl builds her nest, and the mink crawls with its belly close to the ground. . . . We can never have enough of nature. We must be refreshed by the sight of inexhaustible vigor, vast and titanic features, the sea-coast with its wrecks, the wilderness with its living and its decaying trees, the thunder-cloud, and the rain which lasts three weeks and produces freshets. We need to witness our own limits transgressed, and some life pasturing freely where we never wander."

"Live in each season as it passes; breathe the air, drink and drink, taste the fruit, and resign yourself to the influences of each. Let these be your only diet-drink and botanical medicines. . . .

"Be blown on by all the winds, open all your pores and bathe in all the tides of nature, in all her streams and oceans, at all seasons. . . .

"For all nature is doing her best each moment to make us well. She exists for no other end. Do not resist her. With the least inclination to be well we should not be sick. Men have discovered, or think that they have discovered the salutariness of a few wild things only, and not of all nature. Why nature is but another name for health."

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Henry David Thoreau, in one of his letters, speaks of having once seen a book which consisted of one hundred pages of introduction and ten pages of text. I hope I am not being guilty of that sin this evening, but what you have heard so far is only my epigraph and not my own words at that. Some of you, I am sure, have recognized them. They are the words of Thoreau, himself, chosen from his various essays. They were all written over a century ago, and if they were pertinent then--which they were--they are far more pertinent now.

And so I too "wish to speak a word for wildness" and I too "wish to make an extreme statement, if so I may make an emphatic one." I too feel as strongly as Thoreau that for our well-being, mental, moral, and physical, we need the tonic of wildness. Yet we are a people that has prided itself on conquering the wilderness rather than reveling in it. In a little over three hundred years we have not only conquered it--we have demolished it. We have tramped it down, chopped it down, blown it up, dug it up, rooted it up, cemented it over, asphalted it over, and then polished off anything that remained with every poison we have been able to concoct plus many more--such as carbon monoxide--that we didn't intend to concoct but did anyway.

If there is any wilderness in this country that is not bisected by a four-lane highway lined with accumulations of empty beer cans and blatant filling stations, I would like to see it. I have traveled in most of the states of this union of ours and have as yet to see that unbisected wilderness. Yes, indeed, there are pockets of wilderness left here and there, but they are only pockets and even those are invaded by the ubiquitous beer can and coke bottle. (If I seem unduly enraged about beer cans, perhaps it can be explained by the fact that when the snows

melted this spring on my farm in upstate New York, I picked up two gunny-sacks full of beer cans along the road-side through my farm, none of them tossed there by myself or my family.) If we don't stop building four-lane highways, even the pockets of wilderness will soon be gone. We are simply not aware of how fast what little remaining wilderness we have is disappearing. We like to think that the real damage was done a century ago by our grandparents and great-grandparents and that therefore we are not to blame. I am not going to belittle the damage that was done then. It was in many cases unconscionable, without question. But their destructiveness was nothing like ours. They raped the forests, it is true. But then they moved on, and Nature left alone long enough began to repair the damage. True the virginal beauty never returned, but at least something came back. When we today go about our destructiveness, we do a complete job of it. We do it so effectively, so efficiently, so "scientifically," that the beauty will never return. Already more than a million acres here in Appalachia alone have been strip-mined, and more than 5,000 miles of its streams have been destroyed past any present hope of restoration. I hardly need tell you people what strip-mined country looks like. If I had to make the choice I would prefer the landscape of the lowest circle of Dante's Inferno. Nor am I pointing an accusing finger solely at the strip miners. I imagine what they have done will look like paradise compared to what is about to happen to the beautiful desert country of western Colorado and Utah when the oil shale people get through with it. I understand their proposed "solution" for getting rid of the billions of tons of chomped up shale that are going to be the inevitable result of the oil-extracting process is to fill up every beautiful canyon in the area with the debris until it is chock-a-block full and then hope by that time they will have come up with some other solution for the remainder

of it. For anyone who has ever comprehended the beauty of that strange, weird, lovely area, as I have, such a so-called "solution" can be labeled nothing short of criminal.

Nor is my wrath limited to the strip miners and the oil-shalers. They are simply the most extreme examples of our destructiveness. I am, if anything, even more concerned with a more subtle but equally damaging destructiveness that is occurring all around us. It is encroaching upon us so insiduously that we are hardly aware of it. And it is happening virtually everywhere--in your state and my state, in your village and my village. In your neighborhood and in my neighborhood. ~~Stop~~ Stop a moment!

      Recreate in your mind an image of what your community looked like ten, fifteen, or twenty years ago. Now superimpose that image on what it looks like today. What has happened to those vacant corner lots where you used to play ball? There's a building or a parking lot on every one of them. What has happened to that little creek you or your children used to sail toy boats down? It is in sewer pipes and buried underground. What has happened to that little thicket of woods that used to be out back? It has been cleared away and replaced by a ranch house. What has happened to your old swimming hole? It has been fenced off so that you can no longer get to it. What has happened to the little marsh where you used to gather pussy willows and marsh marigolds in the spring? It has been drained and filled in. What has happened to those woods on the outskirts of town that you used to ramble in on Saturday or Sunday afternoons? They have been chopped down and there is a shopping mall in their place. What has happened to the farmer's pasture a little farther out where you used to hold a picnic now and then? If the farm is still there, it is now fenced and posted with no trespassing signs--or, still more likely it has been replaced by a housing development. (More than one half of Connecticut's farms, I am told, have disappeared in the past ten years

and Connecticut is not exceptional.) What has happened to the lake where you used to go boating? It is now surrounded by cottages and the public has no access to it. What has happened to the mountains where you used to go camping? Now there is a "full" sign at every campground. Although we have hardly been aware of what has been happening, we now find ourselves living in a world of plate glass, chromium, concrete and asphalt and nothing else. A century ago the French poet Theodore de Banville complained, "We'll to the woods no more; the laurels are cut down." Today we have to say, "We'll to the woods no more; the laurels and everything else are cut down and the whole place chromed over."

But enough of my lamentations, it is not my intent to confine myself to a jeremiad to you. All is not yet lost. There is hope. There are things we can do. Let us turn to a little known essay on "Huckleberries" that Thoreau was working on at the time of his death and that came to light only a year or two ago:

"What are the natural features which make a township handsome--and worth going far to dwell in? A river with its water-falls--meadows, lakes--hills, cliffs or individual rocks, a forest and single ancient trees--such things are beautiful. They have a high use which dollars and cents never represent. If the inhabitants of a town were wise they would seek to preserve these things though at a considerable expense. For such things educate far more than any hired teachers or preachers, or any at present recognized system of school education. . . .

"It would be worth the while if in each town there were a committee appointed, to see that the beauty of the town received no detriment. If here is the largest boulder in the country, then it should not belong to an individual nor be made into door-steps. In some countries precious metals belong to the crown--so here more precious objects of great natural beauty should belong to the public.

"Let us try to keep the new world new, and while we make a wary use of the city preserve as far as possible the advantages of living in the country."

"I think that each town should have a park, or rather a primitive forest, of five hundred or a thousand acres, either in one body or several-- where a stick should never be cut for fuel--nor for the navy, nor to make wagons, but stand and decay for higher uses--a common possession forever, for instruction and recreation." [ That, by the way, the ecologists tell us is the earliest known call for public parks and forests on record. Our first national park did not come into being until nearly twenty years later.]

But, you will say, those suggestions Thoreau made were fine a hundred years ago when he made them: now it is far too late. It is never too late to begin. And to prove that point, let me tell you where it has worked.

Appropriately enough my example is Henry David Thoreau's home town of Concord, Massachusetts. If there, only eighteen miles from Boston, one of our country's major population centers, they have succeeded in reversing the trend towards destruction and reestablishing some of the wildness, it can be done almost anywhere.

In Thoreau's day, Concord had a population of two thousand. But even then, as Thoreau lamented, "the cougar, panther, lynx, wolverine, wolf, bear, moose, deer, the beaver, the turkey"-- all once natives of Concord had long since disappeared from the scene. In the twentieth century the population has leaped until now Concord is eight times the size it was in Thoreau's day. Yet, today Concord is wilder than it was a century ago. There is far more acreage in woods. The deer and the beaver which Thoreau never saw are back and only a few years ago the first wild moose in two centuries wandered down from New Hampshire's mountains and spent a winter roaming the woods. At one point the town's three rivers--the Concord, the Assabet, and the Sudbury--were so polluted that all their fish died and

the streams were closed to swimming. Now the pollution level has dropped dramatically, the fish have returned, and it looks as though before long there will be swimming once again.

How has all this happened? It has happened because people cared, because people were willing to exert themselves and make sacrifices for a cause they thought worthwhile. They have taken Thoreau's advice and preserved--even reestablished--the wilderness as "common land" for themselves and their descendants: It has not been easy. They have had their setbacks. But they have persisted and in the long run their accomplishment has been great.

Quite appropriately it was the children of Thoreau's good friend Ralph Waldo Emerson who set the pioneer example in Concord, for in 1922 they deeded to the Commonwealth of Massachusetts a large tract of land surrounding historic Walden Pond for "the sole and exclusive purpose of aiding the Commonwealth in preserving the Walden of Emerson and Thoreau, its shores and woodlands for the public who wish to enjoy the pond, the woods, and nature." And thus was created the Walden Pond State Reservation. As is so often the case in such conservation projects, unfortunately the story did not end there. In 1957 the commissioners of the reservation, ignoring the stipulations of the deed of gift, bulldozed down three acres of trees on the shores of the pond and prepared to blacktop them into a parking lot. A group of citizens immediately sued to enforce the deed of gift. The case was fought through the courts for four years at a cost of twelve thousand dollars, but finally won. The commissioners were forced to replant the area they had destroyed and there is now a permanent injunction protecting the entire reservation from any further degradation. In an appropriate turn of justice, those commissioners were voted out of office and replaced by ones who vowed to safeguard the park. The current



commissioners are now doing their best to return the reservation to its original primitive condition.

Walden Pond Reservation was only the first of a whole series of areas set aside within the town of Concord for preservation. In 1936, the town celebrated the tercentenary of its settlement. When the ceremonies were over, the commission in charge, wonder of wonders, found it had a considerable amount of unexpended funds on hand. Exercising an ingenuity not common to such commissions, they purchased the tract of woods just northeast of Walden that Thoreau had always called "Fairylane" for the beauty of its mirror-like pond and shores and set it aside as a town forest, not for wood-cutting, but for walking.

In 1944, at the behest and encouragement of the people of Concord, the Fish and Wildlife Service of the United States Department of Interior acquired nearly four thousand acres of the flood plains of the Concord and Sudbury Rivers and set them aside as a wildfowl preserve and bird sanctuary. Let me remind you again that this was four thousand acres only eighteen miles from downtown Boston and in an area that was rapidly expanding its population. As you can imagine it was not accomplished without a protest. But with determination, people saw it through.

In 1966 Harvard University raised half a million dollars to purchase a whole square mile of what Thoreau called the Easterbrook Country in northwest Concord and set it aside "forever wild" as a wildlife research center. Thoreau had once described it as "a wild and rich domain," but in the intervening century because many of its old farms had been abandoned, it had become far wilder and richer than in Thoreau's day.

In 1971, the Sudbury Valley Trustees, a group of private citizens organized to acquire wild land in the area when town, county, state or federal governments were not able or willing to act, purchased Gowing's

Swamp. Gowing's Swamp is a perfect example of a gem that most people would overlook. It is in the center of a large block completely surrounded by houses and less than a mile from the business center of Concord, And yet it is the epitome of wildness. On August 30, 1856, Thoreau paid one of his frequent visits to it and recorded in his journal his reactions:

"I seemed to have reached a new world, so wild a place that the very huckleberries grew hairy and were inedible. I feel as if I were in Rupert's Land, and a slight cool but agreeable shudder comes over me, as if equally far away from human society. What's the need of visiting far-off mountains and bogs, if a half-hour's walk will carry me into such wildness and novelty? But why should not as wild plants grow here as in Berkshire, as in Labrador? Is Nature so easily tamed? Is she not as primitive and vigorous here as anywhere? How does this particular acre of secluded, unfrequented, useless (?) quaking bog differ from an acre in Labrador? Has any white man ever settled on it? Does any now frequent it? Not even the Indian comes here now. I see that there are some square rods within twenty miles of Boston just as wild and primitive and unfrequented as a square rod in Labrador, as unaltered by man. Here grows the hairy huckleberry as it did in Squaw Sachem's day and a thousand years before, and concerns me perchance more than it did her. I have no doubt that for a moment I experience exactly the same sensations as if I were alone in a bog in Rupert's Land, and it saves me the trouble of going there. . . I felt a shock, a thrill, an agreeable surprise in one instant, for, no doubt, all the possible inferences were at once drawn, with a rush, in my mind,--I could be in Rupert's Land and supping at home within the hour! This beat the railroad. I recovered from my surprise without danger to my sanity, and permanently annexed Rupert's Lane. . . . It is in vain to dream of a wildness distant from ourselves. . . . I shall never find

in the wilds of Labrador any greater wildness than in some recess in Concord. . . .

"I see that all is not garden and cultivated field and crops, that there are square rods in Middlesex County as purely primitive and wild as they were a thousand years ago, which have escaped the plow and the axe and the scythe and the cranberry-rake, little oases of wildness in the desert of our civilization, wild as a square rod on the moon, supposing it to be uninhabited."

And even with suburban homes within a few hundred feet of it in every direction, Gowing's Swamp is just as wild today--thanks to the Sudbury Valley Trustees.

For the last several years a private citizen (a woman whom I much admire but who insists upon remaining anonymous) has been donating large sections of the Fair Haven Bay woods to the town on the condition that they be preserved wild. I have by no means exhausted the list of areas preserved in that one small town of Concord. Rarely a year goes by now that a tract is not added to the preserves. Notice that it has not been one group that has done all this, but many--private citizens, private organizations, the town, the state, the federal government--all working for a common cause and supplementing each other's efforts. It has not been always easy. It, as you can well imagine, is costly to acquire even swamp land. Real estate developers tend to get apoplectic at times and they are not the only ones. But the concerned people plod steadily ahead.

What is equally important is that Concordians have developed a tradition among themselves for preserving the flora and fauna in their own backyards. Instead of cutting down every tree on the lot when they build a home as is so often done elsewhere, they place their buildings in such a way as to preserve as many trees as possible, and in so doing they pre-

serve not only some of the wildness but the privacy of the individual home. Even their real estate developments are planned with preservation of the wild in mind. When, just after World War II, a large tract of woods known as Conantum was taken over as a development, the majority of the land was set aside as "common land" to be owned by the community as a whole. While some of this common land was used for recreation fields and a community picnic area, most of it was kept "forever wild" with not even paths cut through it. Meanwhile each individual house was required to be placed so that it is screened from both the road and the neighbors by trees. The result is that although it is now a comparatively thickly settled area, it has retained an amazingly large portion of its original wildness. (As an historical footnote I might add that I believe this Conantum development was the original of a now fortunately increasingly common method of real estate development known popularly as "cluster planning.")

I have chosen Concord, Massachusetts, as an example of what can be done. I must admit that Concord is an exception; that it has had its difficulties; that not everyone has been happy with it. (I know well one family who had lived in the town since its founding in 1636 who moved away in a huff and shook the town's dust literally and figuratively from their shoes because they were not permitted by the zoners to translate of their farm into an appalling amalgam shopping center and asphalted parking space.) But despite the problems, the people of the community as a whole have greatly benefited and Concord is, as a result, one of the loveliest suburban towns in this country to live in. I know, for I spend six weeks every summer living there and I have found out how meaningful it is to be able to wander out into the wild only a few steps from Main Street.

I have a second suggestion to offer in preserving what little wildness is left. Like the proverbial little red hen, try doing it yourself. It can be done. I know for I am doing it myself. And if in telling my story now I sound egotistic, my apologies. My excuse is, as Thoreau said in Walden, "I should not talk so much about myself if there were anybody else whom I knew as well." Besides, I'm having the time of my life doing it and <sup>(my family and I)</sup> would like to share some of the fun with you. A few years ago, we decided it was time for us to establish our own wilderness. We did it, I assure you, not purely for altruistic reasons. We felt the need for some wildness in our own sould, and most of <sup>what little</sup> the wildness <sup>was left</sup> in our neck of the woods had fences and "no trespassing" signs around it.

Our first (but unsuccessful) effort was to buy a swamp. If you think that strange--and every real estate dealer within miles of Geneseo, New York, thought we were not only strange but insane--I can perhaps explain our motives by quoting once again from Thoreau--this time from his essay on "Walking":

"Though you may think me perverse, if it were proposed to me to dwell in the neighborhood of the most beautiful garden that ever human art contrived, or else of a Dismal Swamp, I should certainly decide for the swamp. . . .When I would recreate myself, I seek the darkest wood, the thickest and most interminable and, to the citizen, most dismal swamp. I enter a swamp as a sacred place,--a sanctum sanctorum. There is the strength, the marrow of Nature. The wild-wood covers the virgin-mould,--and the same soil is good for men and for trees. A man's health requires as many acres of meadow to his prospect as his farm does loads of muck."

Unfortunately we never did find our swamp. Geologically speaking there are comparatively few of them in our area. Of the few there were,

many have been drained. And though we searched "high and wide" (in speaking about swamps perhaps I should say, "low and wide,") we never did find one for sale. But eventually we did find an old farm we could not resist. It was twelve miles from town and, like Thoreau's outpost at Walden Pond, a mile from the nearest neighbor; one hundred and thirty acres bisected by a dirt road so rarely frequented that we still run to the windows when we hear a car drive by. In the center is a farmhouse nearly a century and a half old. For three years now we have been living in the midst of this wilderness and it has made all the difference in the world in our lives. Unfortunately about a hundred years ago some "course and boisterous money-making man," as Thoreau would say, got legislation passed in New York State that favored the lumberers and made, through special tax laws, it financially so feasible for farmers to sell their trees that whole areas of the state were denuded. (Even today if you fly into New York State you can easily tell where the state line is for immediately the large forested areas disappear.) Our farm too was denuded in that process even though most of it was slope area that from the standpoint of erosion never should have been converted to open fields. Of our hundred and thirty acres only forty are forested and that with second or third growth. However, we have set about to right the wrong and each spring we are planting trees by the thousands on the denuded slopes. It will be some time before what the original owners of our place called "Forest Home" will deserve the name once again. But seedlings we planted only two years ago are already lifting their heads above the tall field grass, and there's a thrill to watching them grow.

When the slopes were denuded, the brooks coming down the hillside inevitably eroded into wide gullies. We are planting the gully slopes with shrubs and slowing down the water flow with little dams to reverse the process of erosion. To retain moisture in the soil, last year we had

*(Two thousand pines and laurels are being delivered this Saturday, so I assume you will be busy next week.)*

a pond dug and although its only source of supply is ground run-off, it is already fifteen feet deep. We have started to restore the flora of the area and are gradually bringing back wildflowers and ferns. Although I thought I had long since examined every square foot of our farm, last fall I discovered a huge bed of ebony spleenwort fern on the outskirts and hope this spring to get some of it moved down nearer the house where it can be watched. I think and hope I've succeeded in establishing a colony of maidenhair fern and I know that our Christmas fern is expanding. I'm not a purist, I must confess, so far as native flora is concerned and last summer brought some purple loosestrife back from Concord, Massachusetts, to brighten up our stream beds. We have even been setting out spring bulbs in our more open woods hoping they will go wild and spread as they should. Flowering dogwood is native to our woods--we are just about at the northern limit of its range--but we have expanded our dogwood population by scattering new seedlings through the woods.

Birds happen to be a particular mania of ours. I hesitate to think what our wild bird seed bill is for the winter; I just haven't dared to total it up. But whatever the total is, it has been worth it to see a constant stream of birds feeding a few inches outside our windows. And the crowds of songbirds there have been getting to big that this winter the smaller hawks and shrikes have been dropping in to do nature's job of culling. I am not a blood-thirsty person. As a matter of record I have been a life-long pacifist. But I must admit one of the most fascinating <sup>hours</sup> events of this past winter was spent watching a Cooper's hawk catch a slate-colored junco, devour it on a fence post thirty feet from our livingroom window and then sit there sunning itself and preening itself in self-satisfaction for a full hour.

Along with our reforesting, we are embarked on a program of planting berry-bearing shrubs that birds like--coral berry, highbush cranberry,

autumn olive, and so on. Gradually we are getting up a good array of bird houses. Bluebirds, sadly so rare nowadays, seem to revel in the southern exposure of our hill and a few stay around all winter, virtually melting the ice with their liquid songs. Phoebes and barn swallows build on our front porch every spring. At the moment a white-breasted nuthatch is building its nest in a knothole in a maple on our front lawn. We often wake up at night to the songs--if they can be called that--of the great horned owl and the little screech owl. But it is the frequent sight of a great pileated woodpecker hammering in our trees that never fails to bring the greatest thrill. For our own curiosity we have been keeping a list of the number of species of birds we have identified on the farm and it is now up to 109.

Nor are we forgetting the animal wildlife. We have made an arrangement with the regional conservation office to bring us, when they find them, injured animals or their abandoned progeny. My daughter has thus raised a number of raccoons from infancy by bottle and for a time after they were let loose they would return to our front porch each evening and scratch on the door for a handout. But fortunately they soon adjusted completely to the wild. I think we are probably among the few people who have ever given a cocktail party with a four-hour old deer as the guest of honor. Quite unexpectedly the sheriff showed up with the fawn just a few minutes before our first guests began to arrive. It had been found abandoned in a nearby lake where apparently its mother had been driven by dogs and in the excitement and danger had given birth and fled. It was so tiny that it had to be spoon fed rather than bottle fed. But the spoon-feeding was the highpoint of the cocktail party. Before long it was strong enough to run around and later, when set loose, would regularly appear on



the front porch, stamping its feet until someone brought it a bottle of milk. (Unfortunately it later developed some sort of dysentery because it had never received the natural immunities from its mother's milk and died. But for a time at least we felt honored by its imperious visits.) Full grown deer are regular inhabitants of our fields and woods and we have seen as many as forty-five at a time gambol through our pasture.

In talking about our return to the wild, my theme is not self-righteousness, but joy. I wish I could convey to you how much more meaningful our lives have become. Like Thoreau of Concord and Anteus of Greek legend, we find our strength comes from the earth. We are learning whole new dimensions. Never before have we been so aware of the rain, the snow, the sunshine, the cold, the warmth. The stars sparkle with no smog or street lights to dull them. We greet the sunrise and the sunset with joy. Hardly a day goes by that we do not find ourselves just walking through the fields or wandering through the woods absorbing the world into our pores. As a restorative it is far better than any Baden or Saratoga bath. As medication there is no equal. "In Wildness," truly is the preservation of the World." Let's foster it for ourselves and preserve it for our heirs.

I began this evening with an epigraph by a writer from my native country. I would like to close with whatever is the opposite of an epigraph by two of your regional poets.

The first, Jesse Stuart's "May I Be Dead," echoes the lamentations and warnings of the first part of my paper.

"May I be dead when all the woods are old  
And shaped to patterns of the planners' minds,  
When great unnatural rows of trees unfold  
Their tender foliage to the April winds,

May I be dead when Sandy is not free,  
And transferred to a channel not its own,  
Water through years that sang for her and me  
Over the precipice and soft sandstone. . .  
Let wild rose be an epitaph for me  
When redbirds go and helpless shikepokes must,  
And red beans on the honey-locust tree  
Are long-forgotten banners turned to dust. . .  
I weep to think these hills where I awoke,  
Saw God's great beauty, wonderful and strange,  
Will be destroyed, stem and flower and oak,  
And I would rather die than see the change."

But to end on a happier note, I'll close with the last stanza of Jonathan Williams' poem with a title almost as wonderful as the poem itself:

"BEA HENSLEY HAMMERS AN IRON CHINQUAPIN LEAF  
ON HIS ANVIL NEAR SPRUCE PINE  
& COGITATES ON THE NATURE OF TWO BEAUTY SPOTS"

which I think conveys some of the joy I have tried to express to you in my last pages.

up on Smoky  
you ease up at daybust  
and see the first  
light in the tops of the tulip trees  
now boys that just naturally  
grinds and polishes  
the soul

1  
makes it

normal

again

I mean it's really

pretty!

Tomorrow morning while I am here in Tennessee I am going to go over and  
grind and polish my soul up on Smoky.

Goodnight!