

CHAPTER 13

OF INDIANS, SNOW AND A GOOSE

"My trouble is the big gray goose
Has power to be wild and loose,
While wingless I must stay here."
Wade Van Dore

Indian Island, one of the largest in the Penobscot River, intrigued me from the beginning. In 1786 the Penobscot Indians ceded to Massachusetts all the land in the Penobscot Valley from the mouth of the Piscataquis River westward, to Mattawaumkeg on the east. This had been engineered by a French trader, named Castine, who had married a daughter of the Penobscot chief. He understood white men's land values in ways which the Indians of that time could not. The Indians reserved for themselves all the islands of the Penobscot River from Old Town to Niatous. All other lands were conveniently acquired by the white men by right of discovery.

In modern times, most of those islands are uninhabited; they aren't even good enough for farming, as they are too low, flooding every time the river rises. The few high ones, however, are still planted to corn and other vegetables. While the Indians who own them today are not purebred Penobscots, they are descended from the Algonquin-speaking Indians who lived a subsistence life of hunting and fishing until very recent times. Some anthropologists are now convinced they are descendents of the Red Pait People who are thought by some to have preceded by several hundred years the present day

the Penobscots. It is interesting to contemplate that while some of today's Penobscots are tilling a corn field on an island near Passadumkeag Stream, they possess some of the genes handed down by the Red Paint People, a group of which lived at Passadumkeag. A Red Paint^t People's burying ground has been found on a low hill above the Stream, just in off Rte. 2.

It was an enchantment for me to find myself living in the neighborhood of real American Indians. About half of the present-day tribe was still residing on Indian Island, about the same number as in Thoreau's day. Another three hundred and fifty or so lived elsewhere around the country, many coming back to visit their home base whenever possible. The population was limited on the Island/as ^{until recently} there was no drinkable water beyond the old village at the south end of the Island. With such a small population they were able to make do with a one-way bridge from the Old Town mainland; they had chosen a narrow bridge on purpose to discourage their own as well as white teen-agers from making a speedway of it. In Thoreau's time, and well into this century, a small boat, known as a batteau, was used to ferry people across.

On Thoreau's last trip to the Maine woods, he and his cousin George Thatcher, and Edward Hoar, a friend of Thoreau's since school days, were ferried across the Penobscot River to Indian Island. It was July 22, 1857. They found Joe Polis **dr**essing a deer in his yard; most of the rest of the men of the island were down at the shore after shellfish. When they asked Joe if he knew of a good Indian to go with them as their guide, Joe answered, "Me like to go myself; me wants to get some moose." That began one of the most beguiling stories of the Maine woods.

Thoreau had already given much time to thinking about the native peoples of America; he had already collected several notebooks of information on them so he didn't arrive on Indian Island uninformed. He felt that the Indian had not been properly understood, for he ~~felt~~ ^{recognized} that they had lived in, rather than against Nature as the white man does. He hit it off right from the start

with Joe Polis. They soon struck up a deal that Joe would teach Henry Indian words, and Henry would help Joe with his English. Thoreau, having a facility with words, found the Indian way of combining several syllables into one long word which made a sentence very intriguing. While he didn't know what we know now, that there are about 5,000 Amerind languages and distinct ^sdialects, he knew that Indian languages were sophisticated and musical with expressive imagery. He asked Joe if he could go to school with him on the Island. Joe answered, "Oh yer, good many do so."

Joe probably referred to anthropologists who had already begun to study and write down in improvised phonetic words, some of the native American languages before it was too late, as native children, including those on Indian Island, were learning English and using it in their daily lives and in school rather than the language of their parents. I arrived in the area just in time to know ~~some~~ ^{some} University of Maine anthropologists making tape records of conversations with the last two or three Penobscots who remembered their native tongue. This was being done at the same time with the Micmacs and Passamaquod^dies of eastern Maine.

It was great mental entertainment to sit on the top of my river bank and think about all this pre-Maine and current Maine history while looking across the river at the southern tip of Frase Island, one of the Penobscot islands whose southern tip was directly opposite me. I had learned that when the river is down to normal I could see between the trees near the tip of the island, though I couldn't see the river on the far side nor could I see the mainland over there. I could see the mainland, of course over on that side down below the island. When the river was flooded, the water came up to the lower branches so that the trees looked like tall shrubs because I couldn't see the tree trunks. It was easy to understand how some of the islands were of little use to the Indians.

Not long after I first arrived I thought I saw an eagle fly off over the treetops of Frase Island. I had looked up and seen the bird just too late to be sure, but it was so large I didn't know what else it might be

unless
/ a cormorant, yet it didn't look like a cormorant. A few days later I met one of my neighbors from down the ~~road~~^{road} for the first time because of an eagle. I came out of the cottage door just in time to see the white head and white tail of a dark-bodied eagle fly off upstream. About the same moment someone drove into my yard. A youngish woman got out of her car, introduced herself as Barbara, and we began an acquaintance on the spot which has lasted to this day.

Barbara was obviously incensed about something. She had just come from her neighbor's who lived next door to her. She instantly expressed what was bothering her, without any further introductory ceremony.

"Did you see that eagle?" she asked in a very excited and mad tone. "He was in a tree in my neighbor's yard and was about to swoop down on her two children who were out in the yard."

A bit puzzled I asked, "Are the children afraid of an eagle?"

"The children!" she exclaimed, "The mother was frightened to death that the eagle would carry off one of them!"

Not quite believing my ears, feeling I was momentarily back in the Middle Ages, I asked how old are the children.

"Oh, they are three, four years old."

I sighed inside myself. Knowing that eagles weigh from 10 to 13 pounds at most, I knew that no one of them could ever lift a child that old, let alone a baby, which except at birth, will weigh more than an eagle. A hundred pound human can't lift a hundred pound weight no more than a 13 pound eagle can lift a 13 pound infant. I invited Barbara in, and over a cup of tea I learned that she and all the neighbors hated and feared eagles and resented state and federal laws which denied them the right to shoot them.

I made a faint-hearted try at calling Barbara's attention to how much an eagle weighs and how much a child weighs, as well as to the fact that they

eat fish which is why this particular one which we were talking about had been perched in a tree by the river. I could see I hadn't made much dent in Barbara's notions about eagles, but I could see she was otherwise a very intelligent ~~down-east~~ native, just prone to believe local folklore, as is true of all natives everywhere who haven't had the advantages of modern education. And Barbara, I could see, had not had such an advantage but was capable of most any mental challenge. In addition, she had the most strongly obvious Maine accent I had ever heard. Some of her pronouncements should ~~have~~^{be} preserved on tape.

But I, myself was thrilled to see that eagle, for I happened to know that Charles Brookfield, a Florida biologist, had just two years before investigated the presence of eagle nests in New England and had located one in Maine's Washington County, and one near Bar Harbor. Eagles were still commonly seen further up the Penobscot Valley and other places in northern Maine, but they were not nesting. It was the height of the use of DDT in this country, and it was only just discovered that DDT causes bird eggs to have such thin shells that the parent breaks them in trying to brood them; some eggs were being found in nests of eagles and other large birds which only had a membrane around them, no shells. So the adults^t were not being replaced^d as they died off by an upcoming generation. Because eagles live many years that was not obvious for awhile.

The DDT gets into the laying bird through its diet of fish; the pesticide washes off of farm lands into the streams and gets into the fish through what they eat. Then the eagle eats the fish, subsisting^g almost entirely on fish. If my friend Barbara's contention was right that eagles carry off and eat human children the eagles would be much safer; there'd be little or no DDT in their eggs. But alas, they have a very limited diet.

But also eagles were losing nesting territory, what with vast areas

~~vast areas~~ of trees being cut over for pulp, and more and more vacationers intruding on their nesting areas.

A few days later I happened to be out in the yard when I saw something rather large flying upriver. There was the eagle, his white tail very visible. At least he hadn't been surreptitiously shot. As he turned from the center of the stream toward some dark trees his white head and tail stood out in sharp contrast to the dark background.

I saw him only two or three more times. No doubt all up and down the river trigger-fingered humans had been out hunting him while he innocently tried to find his dinner in the river. Eagles aren't too good at fishing though they spend their lives at it. They look for dead fish washed up and down the river banks, but also they watch for more successful fish-hunters like the osprey, or even the much smaller kingfisher. The ospreys were about as scarce as the eagles for the same reason. But eagles are skillful at heckling an osprey with a fish in its talons, causing the osprey to drop the fish then the eagle dives in the air after it. Eagles do catch and eat rodents; sometimes they will even catch a rabbit. As they are carrion eaters, enjoying dead fish, they will feed on a dead deer or other such carrion. They have been known to catch an ill or wounded duck. But even a duck is only two to three pounds; not ten to twenty pounds like a small human.

Parent eagles are look alike, so I couldn't tell if the one in my area was a male or a female. Like the Canada goose, only they know who is mother and who is father. But you can tell by watching their behavior at a nesting site. The female eagle does do the brooding, and the father brings in the daily food supply. The two of them are devoted parents, for the eggs need over a month to hatch; then the young need to be fed for the next couple of months until they are big enough and strong enough to fend for themselves. But even then, the parents keep an eye on them

for another half year. If they survive guns and poisons an eagled lives for forty to fifty years. Thus they spend half their lifetime tending their young. In fact, though the young are able to fend for themselves after six months or so, they do not mature to breeding age until three and a half years old. They don't have the distinctive white head and tail until then; until then, they look like marauding hawks to those with guns.

I knew that though eagles were still fairly numerous in Canada, and had about one nest per mile along waterways in Alaska, by the time I lived on the bank of the Penobscot, Maine was down to about fifty eagles for the whole state, and not many of those were nesting. Which gave me so much appreciation of the eagle I was seeing on this river. In fact, "my" eagle did not return again. Either it moved upstream to better fishing and less disturbing humanity, or it could even have been eliminated by a gun.

Charlie Brookfield, a naturalist for Audubon Magazine, who had done much eagle research in the Florida everglades, made a study of Maine's eagles in 1966, two years before I arrived on the Penobscot, and the only nests he found in all of New England were a few in Washington County, Maine and one at Bar Harbor. Two injured eagles which were brought to the University of Maine in 1986, were treated; ~~xxxxxxxxxxxx~~ one was shot in the wing at the Topshfield area of Maine and could never fly again, the other, whose wings had become too heavy with ice, was released back at Machias, where it had been found. Pesticides were the cause of poor nesting; such poisons wash into rivers from farm fields or forest spraying, and result in either egg shells too weak to support the weight of an incubating adult, or no shells form at all. In 1972 a federal law ended the worst of the pesticides; by 1976 twelve eaglets were produced in Maine and improvement has continued. Fertile eggs were brought in from the Great Lakes area and from the Chippewa National Forest to help the eagles of the east restore their population.

laws to ban DDT and other pesticides.

One June day I went over to Indian Island to ~~be~~ be nature guide for a group of Indian Girl Scouts which had just formed. One disappointment to me, but very understandable, was that none of the Indians, either grown-ups or children, knew the wildflowers which grew around them. They knew the trees, because of having worked in logging camps; and they knew the wild animals and the ducks, as those were still part of their food during hunting season. I decided that most of the nature study I would concentrate on would be teaching the children the common names of the wildflowers. But it struck me as ironic, that a white woman should teach wildflowers to Indians.

Fourteen girls turned up for the walk around the east side of Indian Island. They had too great an age-span for me to be able to hold the interest of all of them, as they were ages seven to fifteen. Besides it just happened to be a bad day with mosquitos that day. I had already learned through Thoreau's writings of his experiences in the northern Maine woods with mosquitos; ^{he now I} and ^I found that the Indians were just as plagued by them as white people. So though one might expect them to have some immunity they didn't and it was punishment to expect those children to concentrate on learning anything under the circumstance. They don't have any more immunity than we do. Like us, in the right setting, they discourage these biting pests with campfire smoke. That's what Thoreau and his Indian guide did in the northern woods, that is what the Seminole Indians still do in the Florida everglades. But you can't carry fireplace smoke with you in the woods; I won't use poison sprays, and I never happened to see any Penobscots with poison spray cans. But despite all that, the children did learn some wildflowers, and I set up a table full of glass jars for them, with every species we could find, and put a label beside ^{each.} ~~xx~~. Gradually the most interested learned many of them, and in turn taught their parents; I found fathers to be the most interested, to my surprise.

I was pleased to learn that the ground in many open spots in Maine is ~~now~~ covered with bluets in late spring and early summer. I was to discover that Maine has legions of bluets, whereas they have pretty much disappeared in many places in southern New England. They have been obliterated by housing developments, the spread of malls and new roads, and the ever expanding recreation facilities, from neighborhood ball parks to skating rinks. And always and ever the flower pickers. Children are seldom taught not to pick the wildflowers, so they rip them up by the handful then toss them aside when they inevitably wilt. Anyone walking with me is told not to touch a one, even if they seem myriads in numbers. "Love them with your eyes," I tell my walking companions, "but leave them there to produce seed and grow new plants." This I insisted upon with the Indian children.

Yet over the years I have always thought of these little wildlings as belonging to Indians. I have often dreamed of Indian ~~children~~^{children}, before the white man came, picking wildflowers and bringing them home to their mothers to dress up a tepee, for in those days they were in such vast numbers there was no harm done when children picked them. The sight of the Indian children bending over looking at the wildflowers on Indian Island was one of the most stirring moments of my life. But I had to teach them that the destructive, selfish ways of the white man should not be emulated. Some of them did pick the flowers anyway, clinging to their little bouquets, and as none of the flowers they had picked were endangered species, I said as little as possible. To my surprise, at the end of the walk, all of those with bouquets, without saying anything to one another, crowded around me and handed me their flowers. I, who never pick bluets, arrived home with a big fistful of them, given to me by little Indian children hands. I put them immediately into water, for they wilt quickly. As they are easily pulled up by their roots, I took those with roots on them and planted them, with a drink, in my yard. As bluets are perennial, they ~~stay~~^{stay} around for a long time.

All of the little girl Indians seemed to me to be very sharp witted, snap, snap, right on the ball. I have always felt that American Indians, at least those of the north, must have been very intelligent to have bested the wilderness for thousands of years, living right out there in nature, without having been wiped out by the sabre toothed tigers and the dire wolves, to say nothing of the climate imposed upon them by the retreating glacier. Though they did have a more substantial meat supply than more recent Indians in the presence of woolly mammoths. While all of today's Penobscot Indian children have some white blood in them, they still have the major Indian characteristics of dark eyes and straight back hair. All of those I worked with had a touch of humor in their happy faces. They are not white children, though brought up in a white culture.

One day I brought a group of them over to my place, slightly older kids, about twelve and thirteen, to see if I could teach them something about birds. One said my phone was ring^g_^ing, which I couldn't hear away out there in the yard. I went into the house to answer it and when I came out five of them were doing an Indian dance, around and around, on my well cover. I smiled broadly, so they would know I approved, having already learned that was a very strong cover. But I stayed back, to get a full view of Indian children dancing against the background of the river and the island. That scene has remained one of the highlights of my life. Symbolic, Transcendent. A scene from the time when ~~only~~ the wildflowers, the birds, trees, the wild animals lived together in symbiotic relationship on this continent. As the little girls began to wind up their dance they started singing, in their soft-wind voices. I could hear the voices of their ancestors.

For millennia these Maine Indians divided up the north woods among their families for winter hunting season, so that all would have an equal chance at food hunting. In Thoreau's time there were still caribou, as well as deer. By 1884 hunters were limited to two caribou a year, the

2 extra by 10A + 10B

next year to one. But by 1900 they were gone from Maine, though they had been a staple food for Maine Indians for thousands of years, for white hunters had trespassed on the life-sustaining territories of the Indians, in a ruthless destructive way; they drove out the turkey as well as the caribou. Protective legislation didn't come in time to save them, but it has saved bear, deer and moose and other smaller game.

All of the Indian families in Thoreau's time had what might be called a totem, or some animal representation, though not in the form of a pole. Joe Polis's family totem was the bear. When Thoreau was canoeing in the northern Maine woods with Polis, Joe showed him a tree with the figure of a bear in a boat carved into it, with letters cut into the tree. Thoreau copied off the inscription: "July 26, 1853. niasoseb Polis olioi sia olta, onke ni quambi." Translated, means, We alone Joseph Polis start for Oldtown right away." There were the added words: "July 15, 19885, niasoseb." And in Thoreau's presence he added: 1857, July 26 Joe Polis."

Thoreau wrote of this: "On reaching the Indian camping ground, on the south side, where the bank was about a dozen feet high, I read on the trunk of a fir tree, blazed by an axe, an inscription in charcoal which had been left by him (Polis). It was surmounted by a drawing of a bear paddling a canoe, which he said was the sign which had been used by his family always. The drawing, though rude, could not be mistaken for anything but a bear, and he doubted my ability to copy it." *

This Polis family hunting ground, was, at least in part, about one hundred and fifty miles west and north of Old Town, due west of the present northwest corner of Baxter State Park. It is still wilderness country up there today, the only roads being tote roads; most travel in the area is done by canoe. The Polis family territory included the area round Nahmahante and Pemodumcook and to North Twin Lakes. Some of the more adventurous canoeists follow Thoreau's footsteps up through there nowadays; one of the

* All of Thoreau's writings are now in the public domain.

better known is J. Parker Huber, whose book THE WILDEST COUNTRY, "a Guide to Thoreau's Maine" carries some of the best maps, with text, of that country. They help you travel foot by foot with Thoreau.

In Thoreau's day there were 360 Penobscots living on Indian Island. Slowly that increased to 604 Indians at the time of the 1960 census, with about 200 living elsewhere. When I first arrived on the Penobscot they were all living in small houses which looked much like the houses of fishermen in places like Nova Scotia. The few of their houses I was in were kept immaculately clean; the linoleum floors were so shiny you felt you could eat off of them.

I heard one white person say, when I was still new there, that if someone would give the Indians two million dollars they could and would modernize easily, as their interests were no different from ours. While I was still living in the area, one of their lawyers became familiar enough with the workings of government projects so that he made that suggestion come ^t true. After much tribal paper work, the Penobscots obtained funding for three or four streets of modern housing, and a large recreation-office building above the river on a high bank. The Indians took to it all as if that were the only way they had ever lived, as they are very adaptable people. For me, it was a relief to see such a long-neglected group of native Americans brought into the late twentieth century. But it didn't happen without some local grumbling, for there are always those who want it all and are never willing to share.

On September 1, 1971, during the one hundred and twenty-fifth anniversary of Thoreau's northern trip with Joe Polis, the Thoreau group which I'd been working with, known as the Thoreau Fellowship, with

its office in my living room, staged a program at Milford. There were still old mill buildings on the banks of the Penobscot, where we would rather have gathered, so we had to set up our ^{ro} program in a small open, sawdust-layered field between the buildings and Milford's Main Street. But we could see the river off to our right, a bit upstream. Someone borrowed an old batteau, of the kind used in Thoreau's day, and a young man named Wayne Cote, a student at the University drama department, dressed up as Thoreau. He enacted the arrival of Thoreau by coming to the bank where we could see the river, in the improvised batteau ferry. A group of Indians, young mothers and children, in Indian garb, greeted Thoreau's arrival, dancing their way, as they led him to a speaker's platform just big enough for one, Indian drums setting the beat. "Thoreau" read a paragraph from MAINE WOODS. Mr. Albert Meister, Chief Biologist of the Atlantic Salmon Commission spoke on the restoration of Atlantic salmon in the Penobscot, which was only in the talking stage then but was successfully accomplished ten years later. There were other speakers, then down the river came Governor John Mitchell of the Penobscot Tribe, impersonating Joe Polis, "Thoreau" having walked a bit upstream to join him in the canoe. Again the Indians danced and drummed Polis and Thoreau up from the river bank.

On September 11th, nearly two weeks later, we had a dedication ceremony at Abol Bridge under the brow of Katahdin. We had been trying for some time to get ^{the} Abol Bridge name changed to Thoreau Bridge. With the help of Mr. Paul McCann, Great Northern Paper Company's public affairs manager, we were able to attain this goal and Great Northern donated the cost of the paper and the printing of the programs. At that time the paper companies were gradually submitting to the demands of the militant young people of the day to change over from river log driving to truck hauling. Their purpose being to clean the river up, for in many places sunken rotting logs clogged the stream edges. A small group of loggers put on a demonstration for us, at the bridge, making us feel very nostalgic if that were to be the

the last of the log drives, which required such balancing skills and clever handling of their special tool, the peavey. The river is now cleaner, but gas fumes from trucks in the big woods does its own polluting damage.

We had some prestigious people at our Thoreau Bridge ceremony. Standing on the bridge we could look up at mighty Katahdin filling the northern sky, and could imagine the Indian god Pamela looking down on us. Below the mountain, on a terrace in the river just upstream, was a flat, sandy area, Abol Campground, where I was to spend the night in my tent. Thoreau and his party had camped there.

Among those who walked out on that bridge and faced this historic scene was Roland Robbins, who had come all the way up from Massachusetts to read for us from Thoreau's MAINE WOODS. He was the discoverer of Thoreau's cabin site at Walden Pond, and was the discoverer and restorer of the Saugus Iron Works in Massachusetts and had resurrected the Katahdin Iron Works in Maine.

One of the state officials who had come all the way up there to participate in the ceremonies was Maine's Forest Commissioner, Austin Wilkins, who explained the ecology of the Maine woods to the listeners. There was also Talbot Averill, Chairman of the Penobscot Valley Regional Planning Commission, who spoke on the need "to set aside open spaces in the Upper Penobscot Valley." Patrick H. Welch, Environmental Protection Supervisor of Great Northern described what log driving was like in Thoreau's time, and its status in our time, which, as I have indicated, was on the edge of changing from river transportation to trucking. An Appalachian Mountain Club member, John Hakole, of Orono, had, early that morning before the ceremony, climbed up to what is known as Thoreau Spring part way up the

Wald Green
Sherwood

ch 13

A lot of things still had to be ironed in the 1970's. Then, glad to escape that and get outdoors, I washed all the windows of the cottage. Imagine doing that to the tune of birdsong.,- to their warbles and chirps and their conversation-chatterings understood only by themselves. I had painted the window screens a few days before so I now put them on. I mowed the grass at the other end of the driveway, then raked up that and other grass and weed cuttings left from a previous day and threw it all in the compost pile. Shook out the blanket of the couch in the garage, as the sleeping bag of a friend had left reminder feathers behind, then swept the floor of the garage.

I went into the house awhile to sit down and rest while I listened to "Meet the Press" on a small second hand TV set I now had. It wasn't a favorite subject of mine they discussed. Cities. And city problems, which now and then I let myself be concerned about. But I left cities years ago, on purpose, as being abnormal places for the human animal to live.. The cultural opportunities are some compensation, but those can be brought out to rural settings.

When most of the chores were done by late afternoon I flopped on the garage couch and read "The Huxleys", being interested in Julian, who had been a biologist associated with the London Zoological Society, and Thomas, of an earlier generation who went on an exploration cruise to Australia, ~~and~~ who sided with Darwin in his writings hence was ridiculed like others in his day.

Now and then, when you live close to nature, a chance comes your way to help a small creature. One day, in mid afternoon, I was sitting at my desk just inside the east corner window when a sudden small explosion startled me. For a moment I thought one of the electric wires outside had been popped by the wind, which was blowing, but not all that strongly. Then I realized my radio was still going, as I could hear soft music from the other room, so no wire was really down. I donned coat and rubbers and went out to look.

To my surprise there was a hairy woodpecker on the ground below my window, very obvious in his dark checkered feathers. At first I thought he was dead, for it is very common for small birds to see reflections of trees in windows and dash themselves so hard against a pane they break their necks. But sometimes they are just stunned for a while. I picked him up and though he didn't struggle I could tell he was still alive for I could feel his little heart beating under my fingers. I sat on the porch steps and set him down beside me. He certainly looked gone from this world. Then suddenly one eye half opened, but a tiny bit of feather was half covering it. I moved the feather. He blinked fast several times, then closed both eyes and again I thought he was gone. Then a foot moved. Then he opened his eyes and began blinking again. Wishing I had a cage to bring ^{him} in for the night where he would be safe, I picked him up while deliberating what to do. I was relieved when he began to struggle. Fearing he would waste his energy being afraid of me I placed him on the bird feeder. Instantly, he took off and flew to a rough edge of a tree where I had often seen him stop and cling before taking off for the feeder, or the suet. Wondering if he was that same bird, I watched him for about ten minutes. He was obviously still alive but probably resting from his dangerous experience. Sure enough, he flew to the suet, stayed but a moment as if testing where he was and what he could do, then back to the same spot on the tree. I left him to continue my life and let him continue with his when he was ready. For an hour he stayed put, which I knew as I remained concerned about him and kept coming out onto the porch, where I could see him. Then I saw him fly off to a tree back of the garage. Two days later I saw him on the same spot on the close-by tree trunk and watched him zoom over and down onto the suet as he had so often done before his accident. I was and still am sure it was the same hairy woodpecker.

I hadn't yet gotten a television set when American had its first take-off the land on the moon. It was July, and when I went in the yard in the early evening, on some errand, I saw the sliver of a moon over the river, through the trrtops back of the garage. The moon trabelers were not there yet, but I knew they were drwving close. The comfort of summer w armth aurrounding me made it difficult to realize how cold it was up there. But the logical sie of my brain realized it was not July up there.

I was home the morning of the 21st, and knowing there should be some news ot the moon venture I walked down the path to a neighbor's to see if she were watching her television. She was in the window and saw me coming so beckoned me in. I had missed the actual landing, but a rerun was in progress on the screen. I watch ed them open up pir flag. My childhood and teen-age dreams were answered, and no doubt the dreams of all lives touched by the moon from farmers to sailors. I would have preferred a United Nations flag , sinne this was a step for all mankind. And the moon, for me, was over Maine, not over Miami, when the first human footprints were made on it. It was a moment of wordlesness, for it swamped all history-trained thought processes. Then, apparnelty like everyone else, I slipped into the worry-wart stew , wondering what would happen to our collective spirit if those remarkable young men didn't blast off from the moon safely, and get home alive. Thos of use who had settled into the thought-pattern that Columbus had done it all, now knew this was just a beginning. Spcec is unconsonably big out there and there are akwasy adventurous spirits wo just have to ecplore anything that neefs exploring.

As my radio was out of order my neig bor lo ned me a small one. I went through the count-down, getting off the moon as if I were respons ible.

for it. Then there was the docking with Apollo to get through before they could head for home. The whole world was watching with me as I sat there in my little cottage on the Kenobscoot River. I knew that moon would never look the same again. We've been there. We brought back pieces of it. It is attainable.

The vegetable garden I had created by building up a large spot in the wet area between my driveway and the main road was doing quite well. I had filled the bottom with rocks, then added soil and some of the compost which had formed on the old wagonⁿ road out back. To give it a little more body I added some gravel from the small nearby gravel pit, which broke up the heavier compost, and added some raw mineral to the bed. I was amazed at the peas and beans I got out of it; squash and tomatoes were thriving. I didn't try any root crops, like carrots in it, though it began to look as if they^{might} do well.

In the fall I gathered up great bags of leaves and first chopped some into the garden plot, then just piled them over it and held most of it in place against the wind with sticks and small branches which the wind had knocked down out back.

Winter was upon us again before I realized summer had ended. This was made obvious by the fact of^f a first snow^w storm for the season which fell in October.

My next door neighbor, whom I had met only a couple of times as we were both away all day, and he too busy on weekends, ~~whose~~^{whose} wife had come over a couple of times though she, too, worked, came zooming into my yard right after one of the early snowstorms that year, on his snowmobile. They lived in the slightly larger cottage next to me on the south, in this small settlement. That was my first encounter with a^{no} snow^hmobile in action. I'd seen them, of course, at car dealers, and I'd

read much of them, for or against. I had to admit that their cross-bred anatomy was intriguing. But I did dislike the roaring noise they made. I'm a peace and quiet person myself.

My neighbor invited me to climb aboard and ride around my circular driveway with him. It had a very comfortable saddle seat, and footrests on each side which reminded me of the running boards which used to be on cars just below the doors before they closed the steps in. There was a windshield for the driver, but only the driver's back broke the wind for the passenger. I didn't particularly enjoy riding such a monster, so asked to stand on the sidelines for the rest of the demonstration. Its prototype is a bicycle build for two!

What did fascinate me was the tractor treads in the back and sled runners in front. In a vague way, the runners ~~xxxx~~ reminded me of a double ripper I used to ride to the bottom of a steep hill in Keney Park in Hartford. But gravity was the power for the toboggan whereas the treads hitched to motor power pushed the snowmobile whether it was on level ground or going up or down hill, which also meant it had brakes so it could be controlled going downhill. Instead of a steering wheel, this one, at least, had handle bars like a motorcycle or a bicycle. Like the moose, the contraption seemed to be made of parts of other contraptions.

The first time you see a new ^t contrivance in action the novelty of it beguiles. Then you start looking into what it is good for. In this case a snowmobile is an ingenious and successful device for taking care of emergencies in bad snowstorms. Already it has proven its worth by bringing food and medicine to people marooned ~~xxx~~ by blocked roads. A snowmobile can zoom over drifts and across roadless

windblown open fields, or through snow-choked woods. Almost as fascinating as the snowmobile itself are the many^d designs of small sleighs which have been fashioned to be pulled behind a snowmobile. These little sleighs have made it possible to rush people to a hospital, as well as to bring supplies to a farm for both the family and the farm animals.

But, some humans being as aligned with the devil as with the angels, many of them have brought havoc to the wild creatures, and even to the soils, of the woods. The noise which snowmobile engines make in the woods scares the wild life and scatter them, often beyond their feeding supplies or weaken them too much to recover if their stamina is ~~ix~~ already low from the cold and not enough nourishment. Wild animals, like deer, need to ~~be~~ remain as quiet as possible in the deep of winter so as not to waste their limited energy reserve. And, as these contraptions can go anywhere almost, without need of paths, they cause much soil erosion, and ground cover destruction. Young forest trees which are in place to replace older trees are bro^ken down or mashed down.

Mankind seems incapable of inventing a device for good use only. Or, is it the user who incorporates the bad with the good? Snowmobiles can save lives of both humans and animals.. But they can also do almost irreparable damage to the forests and the wildlife, which so recently, other than fire, were so safe from mankind.

When it snows in Maine it snows, and it begins earlier in the year and continues later in the spring than where I came from. I was back in the routine of getting out onto the highway by seven in the morning behind a big logging^g truck. And it was routine now, to shovel paths in my yard. The river was still running ice islands, for it had not yet built up the ice cover to close in the whole river. I still enjoyed stepping over to the top of the bank to watch it when I was home week-ends.

One day, long after the river was solid ice and snow from bank to bank, I sat in the house, typing, waiting for the next storm to hit us which the radio weather report was threatening. Here was the radio saying that instead of starting tonight it would start this afternoon. It was Saturday, and I'd bought supplies on my way from work Friday. But it hadn't ^{ta} started in the afternoon; by 8:00 p.m. the temperature was twenty degrees above zero, which is relatively warm compared to below zero. Sometimes it seemed as if the anticipation added to the length of a storm. The temperature was to drop into the teens during the night so I had my car all wrapped up in blankets, with the tarpaulin over it all, and the block heater plug in place to turn on if needed. As the prognostication was for six inches of snow or more, there already being two feet or more on the ground, I was all ready, holed up. Sometimes it seemed it might almost be better not to know, and take storms as they came ^{as} in the old days. Yet, I knew that didn't make sense. It is always better to know and be prepared.

By Sunday morning both snow and high wind had arrived. Listening to the radio was enough to give one a split personality. One moment I felt delightfully snug, the next apprehensive, as they were telling of the lowest barometric readings in Maine since the 1938 hurricane. What did that mean? I had never heard of such a low barometer in winter. Should I expect the roof of my house to be blown off and down ~~right~~ river? What of near zero temperature with high wind, drastically dropping the chill factor? I was all keyed up. Nothing happened however. Just seven inches of snow.

Just two days later came the next storm. No wind this time. It began about 10:00 a.m., snowed all day, the thermometer began to rise, and most unexpectedly it was soon raining and freezing and my yard was a sheet of ice. This ^w weather wasn't good even for ducks; only for people who could stay indoors.

The snow didn't let up much with the approach of spring. On March

llth it was snowing and snowing. Just pouring down. It was an enjoyable storm if you had to be out in it, for there was no wind and the temperature was just below freezing. The afternoon snow became sticky, so it stuck to the birches, the bushes, everything was bent under its weight. Just before dark the snowflakes turned to feathers, big, light and fluffy and they began to pour down again, this time forming a soft downy quilt on top the wet heavy snow of the afternoon.

The next day the sun came out and turned the world into a blindingly beautiful big white puff. By the weekend it was snowing again. With only a month to go before ice-out. Everyone was concerned about the flood this spring.

By March 16th the temperature was staying above freezing during the day, the snow storms ^{had} seemed to have stopped as we ~~had~~ a couple of days of sunshine. The whole surface of the river was now gray, with yellow-gray ~~wz~~ puddles on top of the ice here and there. By the 19th it was snowing again, and this time it added seven new inches of snow., the sticky kind which had all the tree and shrubs branches ⁿbedding down again in graceful woolly arcs. The river was a smooth white blanket again.

It was this kind of winter and spring which stressed wild animals to their limits. To have snowmobiles routing them out of their resting places was abuse without ^ocompassion. Yet, there were those who deliberately took advantage of the weakness of the animals to go ~~after~~ them, poaching.

It took until April first for the snow to really start disappearing. Maybe this wasn't as bad as Alaska, or with what the Eskimeaus and Inuits have to put up with in northern Canada, but you have to like snow, and look upon it as an adventure which challenges you, to like northern Maine. I still found it enchanting, while admitting there was such a thing as an overdose. After all, snow is an unusual natural phenomenon, and there is nothing so white and pure on the planet than a new cover of snow.

At the end of the first week in April, with the flood waters now up around the birches back of the garage and over on Frese Island, there was that overwhelming sense of relief to know that winter was gone, summer was up ahead. I decided to celebrate by being profligate with my bird seed and some bread ^rcrusts I'd saved for a special moment. I filled the ^etray and ^espread the bread crumbs around on the ground. What a crowd of birds it brought in. I'd been feeding them all winter, never skipping a day, so they couldn't have been over-hungry. But always and ever am I aware, when out in or near the wild, that the key fact of life is a sufficiency of food. There seems to be no end to the supply of it needed by wild creatures, because they cannot raise it, and in quantity, as humans have learned to do. Just so long as people realize that humans, over more than nine tenths of the time of their existence on this planet, found food the way the birds and animals do, - hunting and gathering. It's up to us, with the bigger brains, to not make the process harder for them.

For I now had fox sparrows, juncos, tree sparrows, redpolls, evening grosbeaks, the hairy woodpecker among them, all at once. They were welcome, I was happy to put out my hand, as it were, to help them on their way to their breeding grounds on their long journey northward. One lone goldfinch, an oddity as they are usually in little flocks, one chickadee, no doubt a local one who had been coming in every day ^{with others} and one downy woodpecker, added themselves to the birdy crew. Two days later, when most of them were still around, one mourning dove, also an oddity as one, joined them, but of course ~~xxxxx~~ ^{it} fed on the ground where the others had spilled seed ^f of the tray.

The river ice wasn't going out as early this year as last. But as I stood on the bank and stared at it, I was sure that something was about to happen, for it looked to me as if the ice cover out in the center of the river was about two inches higher than along the shores. I was sure it wasn't an optical illusion. At any moment I expected the center ice to

llth it was snowing and snowing. Just pouring down. It was an enjoyable storm if you had to be out in it, for there was no wind and the temperature was just below freezing. The afternoon snow became sticky, so it stuck to the birches, the bushes, everything was bent under its weight. Just before dark the snowflakes turned to feathers, big, light and flffy and they began to pour down again, this time forming a soft downy quilt on top the wet heavy snow of the afternoon.

The next day the sun came out and turned the world into a blindingly beautiful big white puff. By the weekend it was snowing again. With only a month to go before ice-out. Everyone was concerned about the flood this spring.

By March 16th the temperature was staying above freezing during the day, the snow storms ^{had} seemed to have stopped as we ~~had~~ a couple of days of sunshine. The whole surface of the river was now gray, with yellow-gray ~~wz~~ puddles on top of the ice here and there. By the 19th it was snowing again, and this time it added seven new inches of snow., the sticky kind which had all the tree and shrubs branches ⁿbedding down again in graceful woolly arcs. The river was a smooth white blanket again.

It was this kind of winter and spring which stressed wild animals to their limits. To have snowmobiles routing them out of their resting places was abuse without ^ocompassion. Yet, there were those who deliberately took advantage of the weakness of the animals to go ~~after~~ them, poaching.

It took until April first for the snow to really start disappearing. Maybe this wasn't as bad as Alaska, or with what the Eskimeaus and Inuits have to put up with in northern Canada, but you have to like snow, and look upon it as an adventure which challenges you, to like northern Maine. I still found it enchanting, while admitting there was such a thing as an overdose. After all, snow is an unusual natural phenomenon, and there is nothing so white and pure on the planet than a new cover of snow.

lift up and move out silently from the current pushing underneath, leaving ice shelves behind.

But the date of ice-out wasn't much different from last year. The evening of the 11th I could see some dark water patches out in the center, by which time that raised look to the ice had disappeared. At seven the next morning, when I went out to get to work, the river water was creeping up the banks though most of the ice was still in place. Having to go off to work I missed the next stage of action. When I arrived home from work at four, it was a rather chaotic scene. The general ice cover over the river was still in place, but a sheet of it along shore had broken loose and was pushed up against a tree trunk, where some of it broke and formed a jumble of ice tumbling over itself. There was a great jumble of ice cakes over Plymouth Rock. The scene out there no longer looked as if the center of the ice would lift and move out, but as if it would break into great cakes and all slide up against and onto one another. It was scary, because of the power implied by the pressure behind the ice cakes.

I drove up to the Costigan post office, where I asked if ever an ice jam had occurred which sent great crashing floes up among houses on the shore. Their answer wasn't very comforting. "Yes, it happened in the 1940's, and took a whole side off one of their houses.

It's amazing how imagination rules over logic, especially in the middle of the night. I had the highest bank along that section of the river, and the water was still far below. But half consciously I began gathering up important records and items that I treasured, and books, and things like family photographs. I stacked them near the door before going to bed. And I went out and headed my car toward the highway at the bottom of the entrance drive^{way}. Though I kept remembering that no big flood had come in there since the road was restructured ten years before. But that's too logical to think about after dark when the river is rising.

I went out and looked at it with my flashlight, before locking the door for the night. The river was still far down the bank, but I could see, faintly, that there had been a change since suppertime. There was an open channel just off my shore, which hadn't been there last time I looked, and ice edges were pushed up against the bank. I spent a restless, worrisome night, but it was my own fault for having bought a house on a river bank. When I got up in the morning I quickly went out before starting breakfast, not even bothering to first look out ^t the dining room window. I stood on the bank and looked out over a wide open river. The ice was gone. Only a few small floes were sailing silently by. Must I go through this every spring? Wouldn't it catch up with me some day? Even this year, for flood stage was still to build up.

The reward, as usual, was the migrating birds which followed the opening water. By lunch time there was a flock of twenty-eight Canada geese out beyond the middle of the river, and eight black ducks. A big ice island came along and pushed the ducks and geese over toward the far shore. Oddly, the geese began to stretch their long necks out toward the north, upstream; they looked as if they were pushing upstream against the strong current. It seemed strange that they would work so hard against water energy when they ~~could~~ ^{could} fly over the strong current, especially as there was little wind blowing. Were their wings tired from the flying demands of migration, and they were now making their ^{legs and} feet work?

It rained off and on all day, then a mist began to rise, seemingly off the water near the opposite shore, just south of the island. It looked like a movie scene there was so much bird action going on. Great black-backed gulls had been flying around, and were now ⁱ riding by on a floe. Swallows suddenly flew in, over the gulls, and swooped down near the gulls, rose into the air and turned. Four ducks suddenly appeared, flying downstream about fifty

feet above the water. Two herring gulls sailed by, headed downstream, on a small ice floe, by which time it was pouring rain. I ran into the house to watch from the window.

Big to small ice floes were quite frequent now, causing a constant change in the scene. Canada geese, sailing by on an ice floe seemed to barely notice the geese over by the shore, which were now just floating with ^{ir} the necks pulled in. Three ducks were now fighting to hold their place in strong river current out in the middle. Redwings were walking around on some broken chunks of ice caught against the bank a short ways upstream. A classic example of a sea monster went sliding by, a big piece of log which looked like a massive turtle, eight to ten feet long. I might have expected some birds to be perched on it but there wasn't one. But, strangely, now two to three times as many ducks were coming downstream on floes than I'd seen going up. Of course they could have gone up while I was still in bed.

The action was constant; it was bewildering to try to see it all. But remembering how often I could get out there and live with the migrating birds, be in on the action, this was pretty close to being part ^{of} it. I had to go off to work, reluctantly. I hated to miss one tiny scenario. When I got back about four thirty and hurried to the top of the bank, not one bird was in sight. Not even one duck. It was as if I had dreamed that morning scene. As I stood there, a muskrat swam by, heading downstream close to the shore, as if to reassure me that wild life still lived there.

The most wildflowerly experience I had that spring was an indoor one. I was invited to a wild food class banquet at the University of Maine, and though I myself won't scrounge for food among the wildlings, partly because I want to be a ^hJonny Appleseed and spread wildflowers rather than eat them, also I have long felt that cultivated plants are safer as many of the wild ones have not been tested for alkaloids; and, there is more nourishment in one small potato or carrot than in a handful of spring beauty corms. Still,

Will Geese

I decided to try this feast.

To begin with we were assured that all of the menu ingredients had been collected in Maine, and I could see that all of the species listed were Maine natives; the one variation being that some were not available at the season of the banquet. "We put them in the freezer, when we collected them early last spring or later last fall," was the explanation.

There were about forty items to choose from, so the class spokesman suggested we take a little of everything so we could taste them all. A little of this, and a little of that, I did take and found my plate more than full. There were fiddle heads, wild rice, mussels, littorina snails, (which I had always wanted to taste and found they were even better than clams), fried water lily and day lily seed pods, various greens such as wild mustard and cowslips, candied violet blossoms, water cress, American barberry jelly, gelatine salad with violet blossoms, wild plum jam, the most delicious clam chowder I had ever tasted, and many more things which I didn't get around to listing and have since forgotten. For dessert there was Maine-blueberry pie. While some of the flavors were strange to me they were all beguiling.

While nothing made me ill, which I had been warned could mildly happen, I did have a strange reaction. For the next two days I had a craving for wild foods but couldn't tell which ones. My regular fare seemed bland, puny, blasé, unsubstantial. Even blah. It has made me wonder if we are missing something in our diet which the human race evolved on over the millennia of eating wild plants, long before the cultivated ones were refined.

But it hasn't tempted me to switch to a wild food diet. Now and then I will eat a violet sandwich, knowing that the violets with which we are familiar are not the blossoms which produce violet seeds; the seed-producers are down close to the ground, under the violet plant's leaves. Of course I eat dandelions, for they could easily take over the earth. I do eat watercress, and all wild berries of the edible species. I just don't want to be guilty of "eating the daisies." Though I would eat any of the available

available- wild plants if I were starving. In fact, I have often thought I would

with those

I decided to try this feast.

To begin with we were assured that all of the menu ingredients had been collected in Maine, and I could see that all of the species listed were Maine natives; the one variation being that some were not available at the season of the banquet. "We put them in the freezer, when we collected them early last spring or later last fall," was the explanation.

There were about forty items to choose from, so the class spokesman ^{es} suggested we take a little of everything so we could taste them all. A little of this, and a little of that, I did take and found my plate more than full. There were fiddle heads, wild rice, mussels, littorina snails, (which I had always wanted to taste and found they were even better than clams), fried water lily and day lily seed pods, various greens such as wild mustard and cowslips, candied violet blossoms, water cress, American barberry jelly, gelatine sealed with violet blossoms, wild plum jam, the most delicious clam chowder I had ever tasted, and many more things which I didn't get around to listing and have since forgotten. For dessert there was Maine-blueberry pie. While some of the flavors were strange to me they were all beguiling.

While nothing made me ill, which I had been warned could mildly happen, I did have a strange reaction. For the next two days I had a craving for wild foods but couldn't tell which ones. My regular fare seemed bland, puny, blasé, unsubstantial. Even blé. It has made me wonder if we are missing something in our diet which the human race evolved on over the millennia of eating wild plants, long before the cultivated ones were refined.

But it hasn't tempted me to switch to a wild food diet. Now and then I will eat a violet sandwich, knowing that the violets with which we are familiar are not the blossoms which produce violet seeds; the seed-producers are down close to the ground, under the violet plant's leaves. Of course I eat dandelions, for they could easily take over the earth. I do eat watercress, and all wild berries of the edible species. I just don't want to be guilty of "eating the daisies." Though I would eat any of the available

available- wild plants if I were starving. In fact, I have often thought I would

make a good war refugee, were I refugee out in the country, not in the city, for I could scrounge for ~~x~~ food off the fields and forests. As to the alkaloids, I have long been suspicious that it wasn't smoking and his lungs which finished off Euall Gibbons, the nation's top eild food advocate. After all those years of testing the taste of wild things, and eating so many species never yet tested in laboratories, I wouldn't be surprised if the building up of alkaloid poisons wasn't the r l cause. For him or his family to admit to food poisoning would end the sale of his books.

By my fourth year by the river my vegetable garden was producing squash, beans, tomatoes and other produce in too great quantity for me to consume. But it was a pleasure to work out ther then take a stroll along the old Thoreau carriage riad just beyond and look at the river, and across to Frese Island, always hoping to see a marvel. One afternoon I walked over there after watering the tomatoes, and there was a great blue heron sittin on long ~~xxxxx~~ ^{against} Frese Island. It was getting into the last half of Septmeber, and I had expected frost by now. As both tomato and squash plants are of tropicsl origin I thought they'd be nipped by now, but a river does modify the microclimates along its course. There were no hills here, either, for cold to slide downhill.

By the time the first snow was sifting through the trees and sugaring my lawn, there were robins all over th yeard, and their favorite food, earthworms, had not yet culled back deep into cold soil. If the bird could speak English I would have scolded them not to be so dilatory. Had hey been folled by the unusual armth that

fall? Usually, birds which migrate are more influenced by length of daylight than by temperature, though weather does affect their behavior, especially storms. Robins usually migrate in flocks, just as with the group of them in my yard, filtering through the trees and the fields on their way south or north, unlike some birds which just pick up and go, making long-distance flights before stopping to rest and feed, and a few don't even stop for that, keeping going until they get to their destination. like the Golden Plover, which flies non-stop from Labrador to South America. But I wasn't too worried about the robins; I knew that when they got down to the Penobscot Bay area they would find open, unfrozen country, as the storm we were having had not reached down there.

The river was still sliding by, as if it would always be that way. When I went indoors after watching the robins I began the subconscious vigil of watching out the window for river changes. I looked now to see if the fog, which had been slipping in as I was watching, had lifted enough to see the island trees which had become obliterated. It seemed to be lifting while I was watching, which is sometimes the way with whiffs and tatters of fog. A kingfisher dropped down on a slant from a bank tree, hit the water, and seemed to go under. He fought his way up with much splashing, a silvery fish in his bill. He disappeared in the fog into the treetops in the direction from which he had come. Loons had been near Plymouth Rock earlier in the morning, but they were long since gone. Looking at the river right now, a newcomer would never suspect that there would be, very soon, a fleet of little ice ships sailing by, nor did I have any inkling that freeze-up of the river this time would bring a birdy drama I would remember the rest of my life.

One of the special things about Maine winters at night, is the brightness of the stars. When I was out there running my motor one of the late fall evenings, I brought my binoculars out with me. I had not tried

the Pleiades before with my field glasses so I was much surprised to see now that more than the "seven sisters" were visible with such low magnification. I'd always assumed you had to use ~~xxx~~ a telescope to see more than ~~xxxx~~ ^{the seven.} I knew from the textbooks, of course, that there were many more. Now I saw it for myself. I had learned in the past that looking at a constellation like Cassiopea with binoculars distorts its shape. But now, after enjoying the little mob of stars that made up the Pleiades, I swung my binoculars to Orion, which has always been my favorite constellation and which spreads itself out over such a large section of sky I knew I couldn't see the constellation in such a small field of vision. But, I hopped, skipped and jumped to this, then that, part of Orion, then suddenly, the view in the binoculars hit on something I'd seen in books, but again had thought ^t was beyond the power of a simple pair of binoculars. It was ^e the nebula in Orion. A mind-boggling gaseous cloud which is supposed to be 6000 light years away from Earth, and covers such a vast area in space it would take light years to travel through ~~the~~ it.

It is one thing to look at birds on a tree limb, or flying overhead with binoculars which bring them up close enough to be able to identify the species, but another to look through them at distant stars. What overwhelmed me as much as seeing that ~~the~~ ^{the} nebula in Orion ~~is~~ was the realization that most of humanity, which is made of the same atoms as the stars, never look^s at the sky ^{though} so many books and star maps are available today. The stars were a gr^eat mystery to our illiterate primitive ancestors; it was they, who living out in nature night as well as day, assigned mythical shapes and qualities to the constellations.

Both the primitives and modern literates have been aware of the insignificance of man measured against the universe. Maybe most of us can't face the fact of our insignificance hence we ignore the obvious.

But once I realized that the astronomers had not found either heaven or hell out there back of the stars, ^I decided I was going to spend eternity exploring outer space once I am rid of my handicapping physical being. When one woman heard me say that she commented ^d "But it's so cold out there." Well, that's the advantage of leaving your body behind. If we have all eternity ahead of us, I sure don't want to spend it either ~~for~~ ^{for} some inconsequential sin, or list^{en}ing to angels sing forever. It would take all of eternity to explore all of outer space, so that's where I'm going, having been born with the explorer's spirit. There's an awful lot out there, black holes, quasars, suns which surely have planets like ours but which have developed in different ways. Comets, asteroids, and there's that moon. I gotta get there! When I stumbled into my warm bed that night I was muttering to myself, "And all these years I thought ^t you had to have a telescope to see a nebula!"

It was in the middle of that November that I noticed a Canadian goose on or near the edge of the ice, by a long open space two thirds of the way over to Frese Island. He was almost directly across from my window, ^a bit northward of it. Shrub branches in between broke the view a little. After awhile I realized that the goose remained in the same position. it wasn't moving about in any way. Still later, I decided he was frozen into the ice at the lower end of the channel. I called the game warden, hoping he had some simple way to get out there, though I knew the ice, at least at the channel edges, wasn't thick enough yet to hold a heavy snowmobile. But there was a narrower but open streak of water which extended practically to the woodlot out back, at my end, enough for a boat.

But the warden said the goose probably had a broken wing, perhaps from gunshot. He insisted it wasn't worth risking a human life for a bird; but in this case, I couldn't see the risk. A little work, yes, getting

a small boat into that channel out back. My kayak was disassembled for the winter, else I might have tried getting out there myself, and bringing the goose in. I could keep him in the garage all winter, and feed him until spring. I knew, however, he would probably be too big and heavy, weighing ten pounds or more, which I would have some trouble subduing, though I might have gotten a pillow case over ~~it's~~ ^{his} head for safe transportation. I was reluctant to try it alone.

Shortly after the warden left, the goose turned around and was facing south; ~~he~~ seemed to be moving slightly, though I couldn't tell in what way. He stretched ~~his~~ long neck out and started to peck at the ice in front of him. I couldn't think of anything else all afternoon but that goose out there. I couldn't pin down to my desk chores, nor could I discipline myself against looking ~~at~~ ^{out} the window at him. Then one time I went to look, the goose seemed to be free, and was moving actively up and down the open water channel at the southern end, not going very far from where he had appeared to be frozen in. Maybe the ice around him, ^{because of} his own body heat plus the sun's rays, had melted, like the snow does along my roof edges when the sun hits it. After awhile, the bird appeared to be settling down to sleep on the ice, on the rim of the channel. It was supposed to get colder during the night, and maybe snow by morning.

It did not snow during the night, and though the temperature did go down a bit, the channel was still open in the morning. I wasn't sure but I thought I could see the goose at the far end of the open water, upstream. But I was too late getting off to work to go out there with my binoculars. When I returned home late in the afternoon I was astonished to see a ~~whole~~ total of six geese out there. I was also surprised to see that all of the geese were out of the water, standing around on the river ice. I was sure one of them was the lone goose of yesterday. In a few moments there was no doubt of that, for after unloading my car of groceries near the doorstep

I drove the car over to the garage, hooked up the block heater for the night, and, not thinking, slammed the car door. Instantly up flew five visiting geese leaving the lone one standing behind on the ice, now obviously not flying because of a broken wing.

Who were these visiting geese? Were four of them the young of the year and one the other parent bird? Can geese usually mate for life. Do geese sympathize with a fellow member in trouble and try to help? Had these five been migrating with the one which was hurt? Had they been frightened of^f by the gun, then when they saw that the sixth member of the flock was not coming did they go back to find it? If the shot one had been killed would they have gone back and tried to find it, but had they heard this one calling?

After what happened next I felt unashamedly anthropomorphic about the situation. The lone goose, left by himself, watched his disappearing companions intently from the spot where he was standing on the ice, his neck stretched up as high as he could get it. As his friends disappeared further downstream toward the Milford dam he lowered his head but kept his neck stretched out as far as it would go in their direction. It was a heart-breaking sight. I yearned to stretch out a long arm and rescue him, to let him know someone cared. To at least comfort him.

I knew one thing. I wa^s sister of this old wild goose and my heart stretched as earnestly toward him as his long neck was stretched toward his disappearing friends. There are times, among humans and geese, when companionship is inexpressibly unattainable.

When the goose could no longer see or hear the other geese, and it was apparent they were not coming back, he stepped off the ice into the water and turned his back to downstream as if deliberately trying to forget. He seem^ed to huddle down into himself, as if hiding in his own feathers. An abandoned, dejected little creature of the wild. One of the flocking kind, not used to being alone. The last I saw of the goose before dark he was

all scrootched up together. I had the thought^t that at least he would be warm, as there is nothing warmer than feathers.

In the morning, the part of the river where I had last seen the goose was frozen over. But there was still an open space a short way upstream, and using my field glasses I could see the goose floating around up there. But what was going to happen when it was all frozen over? It was bitter cold as I went out to try my car motor, and I faced the fact that it was past the time when I could hope to help that lone goose. I had been berating myself for not having assembled my kayak that first day, yet I knew I couldn't have handled such a big bird which was still well enough and strong enough to resist.

So off I went to work, unable to do a thing for brother or sister goose. When I arrived home late that afternoon my heart rose to see the other five geese out there again. It must be one family. Had they been with the injured bird most of the day? They were all standing around on the ice, where they'd been before the channel froze over. No one could have been more surprised, for I was sure they were all on their way south by now, for, though they do store fat for migration, they drop down and feed along the way but here there was nothing to eat; just snow and ice.

Later I learned that the river was still open below Bangor Dam. After^{supper} when I came out of the house to look at them, some of the channel had partially reopened, and they were all now in the water. Believe me, this time, I didn't even shut the car door tight, let alone slam it. It was a comfort to me to see the five visiting geese out there, and soon it looked as if they were spending the night, for they had their heads tucked under their wings. But how long could they keep this up. It was impossible that the wing of the injured bird could heal in time for it to join its flock and fly out of there, for the bird was much too heavy for broken or injured bones.

The next day I was home all day, and the whole six geese were still out there. For while I kept looking out at them, and they seemed quiet, just standing around or preening. Then I got so busy I forgot them. At noon, when I left my desk and went into the dining table area and looked out, all the geese were gone except the lone one! I went outside with my binoculars and searched up and down the river, but not a goose was in sight other than the one out on the ice. I knew this one could live for a while on his migration fat. I considered buying some grain and trying to get it out to him but I had no faith in the river ice. He was not a fish eater; he needed a vegetable diet. He had all of December, January and February to get through.

The next day, being Sunday, I was still home. It was a melty kind of day, and the small bit of open channel seemed to have widened. The goose hung around on the ice at the southern end of the small open spot, as if to stay as near as possible to his departed friends, or family. I kept thinking "him", but for all I knew it could have been the mother of that brood, or even one of the young which the parents didn't want to leave behind.

Now and then during the day "he" got out on the ice and stood around. He now appeared to be listing to one side. Either the injury itself was hurting, or an infection had begun which was painful. He began to look as if he couldn't stand up straight any more. But worse was to come.

During late afternoon mist began to rise from the river ice. I could barely discern the goose through it. I was building up a big head of steam over him and ~~sax~~ couldn't settle down to work. If only the weather would hold off for a while, or if it could be a mild winter, to give that bone a chance to heal, using his migration fat. But I wasn't very optimistic. I had a whimsical thought which often entered my head. There are no ambulances to call, no first aid paramedics, no hospital bed waiting, no prosthetics. Anything that gets injured in the wild is on its own. Which is why birds and

animals are so skittish when danger appears. It is why you can't walk up to a wild bird or animal. It knows^w it has to take care of itself.

I sat looking out the window, watching the goose's faint form between me and the island. I began trying to apply some of those^e oriental philosophies. Why was THIS goose created? Just to be food for another beastie? Why did he have to go through such anguish first, before his destiny was to make of him a part of the food chain? Did he have a soul? Some religions would be horrified at such a thought. Others would let him go to as high a heaven as man, as Thoreau would say. I had a cousin once, who actually believed that the animal world was created by the devil. Only humans were created by God, though she conceded that God made the world. Is the suffering of that goose out there just mindless nature? Why can't I call him, or will him, over here where I could protect and feed him all winter? I'd go hungry myself to help him, if need be.

A smothering snowstorm moved in during the night; I left for work in the morning in bitter cold and such swirling snow I could see neither the river nor the road. I was back by mid afternoon; most places of employment had closed early because of the storm warnings. I had an errand at the little post office the half mile beyond my place. It was only snowing lightly now, and I could see the trees on the island at its northern end. On my way back I slowed to almost a stop at several open outlook spots where I could easily see the river. There were no open channels anywhere; only a snow blanket, with ice underneath, from shore to shore.

As I approached my place, and could see the river through the thin, leafless woods, there were a few snowy mounds not far out on the ice, which appeared to be water vegetation covered over. Tufts of grass and sedges, snow-wrapped. When I drove into my yard I got out of the car fast, ran into the house for the binoculars, and shuffling my way through the new snow I studied the river where I had last seen the goose

in the mist. There was a rounded snow-covered mound where I had last seen him. I just knew that was my goose. I knew he had submitted to the inevitable during the night. He had given up the struggle for he was too much alone. Not all pathos is on the human side.

That mound remained there all winter, where there had not been a mound in previous winters. It grew bigger and higher with every snow-storm until finally the snow leveled it off and it was but a bump on the winter's deep accumulation. I kept a loving and grieving eye on it all winter. Then one morning in spring, when I looked out the window, there was an open channel and the mound was gone. My goose was on his way to be recycled through the hungry fish, and the cattails, according to nature's way.

When the ice went out, and geese and ducks moved upstream, none of the geese tarried, at least in the hours when I was home. Had they forgotten the injured goose? Could they see he just wasn't there, and they moved on hoping to catch up at the family breeding grounds? Were they capable of remembering, or did the new geese of the year fill in for the missing? Or, even, did those five visitor geese come back alive from their wintering grounds? Or just some of them? I will never know the answers to any of these things, and maybe it is just as well. It is too big a burden as it is to see one's human relatives and friends drop out over the years. Who should let themselves care about one bird in their millions? But then, we are now expected to care about humans in their billions. That requires thinking about.

The flood was relatively inconsequential that spring. But after my fourth summer on the river I was becoming restless about trusting it. For the river to have filled to the brim of my bank that one year, in so short a time, what would happen in a wetter year? Something within my

thinking gear began to take on a subtle hint of foreboding. I was always one to remember the existence of the law of averages. The job to which I was driving every day, at such energy-cost in winter, didn't offer much use of my education or experience. The winter up ahead would inexorably bring back the struggle ^{to keep} a motor going and to stay alive on a dangerous highway. These two concerns had me feeling once more like a bird on a windowsill, ready to take off. I yearned to follow the birds south.

I hated to part with the river. After all, not everyone can live by a river, especially in northern Maine. I found myself remembering my Penobscot Indian friends. Could I part with them? There were my Goslin friends, in the small moccasins shop, where I had so often watched him making moccasins, and talked to her about ^{past} Indian days. Then there was the Indian woman who had taken in several Indian children who were without homes for various reasons. One day when I was visiting her and the children, she was out in the yard feeding 200 baby chicks which had just arrived. There was something about her manner that made her look exactly as if she were mother-henning. The scene was complete for there was a baby robin, old enough to have its feathers but too young to feed itself. It ran in among the chicks, with its mouth wide open. The woman had a trowel in her hand, and every now then she stepped a few feet away, dug into the soil, retrieved a worm, and stuffed it in the robin's mouth. The way in which she got that worm into the mouth ^{and down the bird's throat} I will remember if I live to be two hundred. But I can't really explain it. With a finger and a knuckle down it went, no fussing, no nonsense. Of all the laboratory assistants I have watched feeding baby birds, including what I have done along that line myself, I never saw such finesse. That bit of action by an American Indian woman, has helped me to better visualize the little wildlings which primitive people took in and tended over centuries, over millenⁿia. This is the forerunner of the behavior by humans which eventually

led to, and made possible, the domestication of what were all once wild animals, even cattle, sheep and horses.

I found myself remembering the day three Penobscot Indian ladies came to visit me, to talk about the possibility of a Thoreau cabin on Indian Island. They were like any white ladies I'd ever met, dressed in their best and going out to tea. The conversation was delightful as they are very friendly folk. I thought I would burst my buttons with the pride and thrill of sharing tea in my house with Penobscot Indian ladies on the bank of their famous river. I'd have had them over more often if I were the tea-sociable type, but they were more like ^{peer}my contemporaries, interested in more urban things than attracted me.

I woke up one morning with my decision made. I put my nice little cottage up for sale, - on its perch above the Penobscot River. To my surprise, and partly to my relief, as well as sadness, a man school teacher appeared out of nowhere and bought it.

Need I say, I headed for Florida, free, free as the birds, to be with the anhingas, and herons, and egrets, and spoonbills, and yes, with the alligators, all winter. I had already spent at least twenty-five ~~winters~~ winters in Florida, having family down there. If I couldn't catch up with moose and caribou in Maine, I could camp with the egrets and alligators in Florida.

To say goodbye, before climbing into my car and driving out of there for the last time, I stepped over to the top of the river bank and looked once more up and down that fascinating glacial stream, never dreaming that it would, before long, prove that maybe there is something to womanly intuition after all.