

CHAPTER 15

MINE FOREST EDEN

"The morning wind forever blows, the poem of creation
is uninterrupted; but few are the ears that hear it."

Thoreau

When I arrived back in my yard in mid April I felt so euphoric over just being there, where I could walk right into my forest cabin home, I caught myself smiling at the trees. Everything looked winter-dead and there were big snow patches in the shady woods, but all was full of the promise of spring. My trained eye couldn't see it, but the calendar said so, and so did the position of the sun in the sky. I was HOME. And in love with my trees. All of them! The whole forest of them! What a contrast to last spring, when Tobacco Road seemed my address.

I opened the door, went in, and cast a loving eye at my modest belongings, subconsciously relieved to see all the books were still in place. The thought had run through my head, when I was two thousand miles away in Florida that I could arrive home to see a whole side of my house sawed off. Even in Maine, there are vandals; they back a small truck up to a cabin, cut a side away with a power saw, leaving heartbreak for the owner. Two thousand years after Christ we seem to be slipping backwards.

But, everything was intact. I quickly lit Miranda to take off the chill, and busied myself with a myriad of chores, even further contented that I had

returned home with enough earnings for that dreamed-of fireplace.

The weather held good for the next few days, and as spring is the best transplanting season for most native plants I busied myself with that chore, as there were enough ~~spots~~^{melted} spots where the sun hit every day. I had brought some cowslips which I'd gathered from a friend's farm on my way. The marshy area out south of the privy, where the small brook filtered through, was ideal for them, and, as with most marshes, it was one of the first places to thaw. On my next trip to and from Milford and Old Town for groceries I stopped and gathered a few arbutus plants, and several little fringed polygala plants which I knew were growing along the roadside in an obscure spot. As I never enjoyed shopping, I often turned such a trip into a natural history expedition.

Less than two weeks after I got back, I went down to Bangor to choose a fireplace at the big Sears store there. I did wish I could have one of the brightly colored ceramic ones, but I was so happy to afford any fireplace that I had no trouble settling for one of the black cone ones. A friend, Paul, son of one my Penobscot River neighbors, brought it up for me from Bangor, and set it up. He had come in a couple of days ahead of time and made aⁿ old-rose tile flooring for it, which he hemmed in, to keep the tiles in place, with a wooden frame. And he'd put up strips of fire-proof metal, with a brick pattern, on the wall back of the fireplace spot.

Then I think he got as much pleasure out of setting up that fireplace on the tiles as I did watching him do it. The biggest job was ^putting a hole in the roof, covering the hole with a metal protector, then setting up the big, fat outdoor chimney which comes in three layers to protect the hole-opening and the roof. While the whole outfit, including the tall ^{indoor} stove pipe from the fireplace up to the ceiling was black, the outdoor chimney was galvanized metal so was silver-colored. With its cap on, to keep out rain

and snow, it was a very substantial chimney-stack.

Paul had to leave before a fire could be lit, so I waited until I had time to both watch it for problems, and to savor the moment of the first flames. I knelt in front of it, with my knees on the frame of the tiles, struck a match on the tiles, lit the carefully arranged paper, kindling-sticks and the pieces of hickory and oak I had saved for this first moment. As the flame licked up the crumpled paper to the twigs, I said out loud Henry Thoreau's words from his poem, "Light-winged Smoke, Icarian Bird,"

"Go thou my incense up from this hearth

And ask the gods to pardon this clear flame."

I watched the wood catch, and the smoke start up the tall indoor pipe. Then remembering I was also testing it, so I jumped up and ran outdoors and looked up at the big chimney. Gently, wisps of smoke were slipping out from under the cap into the forest air. It all seemed to be working as it was supposed to. But just to make sure, I hung around in the house, and went outside several times, as the stovepipe heated up, for it was a chilly damp day, and I let the fire develop, then added more wood as needed. Come suppertime, I sat in the rocker, with my plate in my lap. Today marked a notch in ceremonial time, and I so marked it on the calendar.

I had picked up the sniffles somewhere, and also a late snowstorm slathered everything outside. I lived in front of that body-and-soul-warming fireplace for the rest of the week, with my books and papers, and radio music in the background. Often I looked away from what I was reading to watch the sunbeams of yesteryear flicker on the hearth with the energy and light releases as I watched. For forty or more years a tree gathers in the energy from sunlight, and with the help of the chlorophyll in the leaves converts the energy into wood. There that energy stands trapped, stored,

in a forest of trees until one day it is either released into the soil in a decomposition process assisted by soil organisms, slowly, very slowly, or it is released rapidly as it is burned in a stove or fireplace, or in a forest fire. A wood-burning stove is more heat-economical, but an open fire permits one's soul to enjoy nature's process of using oxygen to hasten the process of ^{the} ^{ing} ^{return} of energy to the air and substances to the soil in the form of ashes. Much of the time I just sat hypnotized, watching this cosmic action in miniscule.

Now and then I looked out the long windows at the snow falling on the spruces and the old apple tree across the lane. Being in Florida all winter I had missed the beautiful snowstorms of the evergreen woods. It was as if Nature were putting on a special show for me to make up for what I had lost. The sniffles disappeared rather quickly, in a couple of days. I told myself that the fireplace fire had roasted it out, but I suppose it was a mild form of whatever cold bug I'd had. The sun came out the day after the snowstorm, and that was the end of cotton wool on the trees.

Obtaining wood for a fireplace or wood stove is a chore I have always enjoyed. I get real satisfaction out of it, for it is one of the few things you can do today which is related to living off the land. Most of the forests around me were spruce, balsam and pine, all of them poor firewood, especially the first two. But there were always some birches, and ash here and there, available as windfalls. The greatest number of windfalls, however, are always balsam, as they are shorter lived. And the fact that you get it free if you gather it and cut it up yourself, gives it some value as firewood; it will burn, the sooner if something better is added to the fire with it. The patch of woods out back, just beyond my back yard, always had balsam windfalls somewhere in it.

Gathering firewood often took me afield. I learned that where pulp people cut a section of woods they always leave odds and ends of pieces behind. Enough to fill my car trunk two or three times. A similar source of small pieces was where a family would come in and cut a big butt log left behind

by loggers, cut it up into two or three big hunks and load it onto their pick-up. Often they left smaller pieces behind, just the right size for my small fireplace. I reminded myself of seagulls, following along ^{fish-} behind crop gatherers and picking up what they threw away. But with cordwood getting more and more expensive every year it was worth it to me to go out and gather my own supply.

There were other sources of firewood which reminded me that I was being a scavenger. Every time I saw a piece^e of wood dropped by the road side I stopped and picked it up. Over a year's time, counting summer, that added enough to my pile to make it worth the effort. Also, there were two town dumps which I had to pass by going to town, one when going the short way, and the other the long way. There was almost always wood of some kind for the taking, though much of it had to be cut up when I got it home. Occasionally^{ly} some of it was stove wood, much of the time it was scraps from carpentering; especially^{of} help when there were odds and ends of four by fours. Even two by fours were very good. That kind of wood was dried, well-seasoned, so had to be watched as I never built a bon fire in any fireplace. That ~~would usually~~^{could} result in a chimney fire.

I always kept a stack of fireplace wood in the house, as well as a handful^f of kindling twigs, in a metal container in back of the fireplace, where it not only was handy if storming outside, but very dry by the time I got around to using it. In spring and fall, I also kept a small stack of it^{all} in the back room, for the same reasons. But most of it I stacked in conventional cordwood piles, if not always the usual four feet by four feet by eight feet for I put the piles in different places. When I stayed there for the winter, I stacked the wood against the wall at the back of the building, on either side of the back door, to help break the wind. Other piles I stacked near the big handsome balsam, and over near the apple tree. As I collected wood any and all times of the year, as it became available,

some piles would keep growing as I used up other piles. The idea was to give them all a chance to dry out, in the sense of green wood drying, while I kept using up a pile before it reached the rotting stage.

I kept a small stump near the privy for a chopping block, where chopping or sawing went on all year. Even on a rainy day, if I got tired sitting at my typewriter, I'd run out and chop or saw wood for a while for exercise. I had brought my old wheelbarrow with me from down by the Penobscot, so I frequently pushed it over to the chopping bloc, filled it, then parked it by the back door until I had time to carry its contents in.

The whole process of gathering wood, splitting, sawing or breaking smaller kindling by hand, carrying it into the house or pushing it over in the wheelbarrow, to taking it to one of the cordwood piles, was always a favorite activity. It is one of the race-memories of mankind. I don't ever want to forget that long line of forebears, whose only source of heat and comfort was burning wood in the days of no axes and saws or only stone axes, whose insightful knowledge of life in the wild kept the human race in existence despite drought, forest fires, hurricanes, blizzards, floods, cold, earthquakes and volcanoes, all the vicissitudes which Nature threw at them but which they survived by their wits. And understanding fire was one of the keys to the knowledge which kept them from becoming extinct the way countless other species became extinct over the millennia. I have always wanted ~~xxxx~~ a continuum contact with that, unlike most of my contemporaries who look down their noses at such basic chores to attain comfort. To me it is being in tune with a part of the workings of the cosmic orchestra.

Such experience, or even the desire for it, is lost to people who live among the canyons of city buildings, who depend upon movies and television for action, who passively sit with crowds who are also passively watching games from stadiums, who go to gymnasiums and special classes to find

artificial exercise to keep themselves alive.

This second spring I put more time into digging new wildflower and fern beds. By now I knew just where what would be. I had worn footpaths around the potential nursery bed areas, most of which led into the woods southward off the car lane. In off one of the paths I was astounded to come upon a purple fringed orchis, almost shoulder high, in among some tall weeds and raspberry briars. On my own property! I cut back the vines away from it, but otherwise left it untouched. A young one was alongside it.

The soil was quite friable in that area, so I brought in some long, dead balsam poles to mark off a bed, about twenty feet in off the lane, for an hepatic bed. Knowing they interbreed anyway, and as I can't always tell them apart, I put round-lobed hepatics at one end of the bed, and sharp-lobed ones at the other end. I marked off another similar bed, close by, for both giant and false Solomon seals; I prefer to call the latter Solomon's plume for why call it "false"?

Not far from all of those I dug an extra bed for white trillium, and down the path from that bed I had a yellow lady's slipper bed in mind, as I had ordered some from a nursery. The yellows are relatively easy to transplant, as they will accept soil that is not too acid. A handful of limestone and some chopped maple leaves would keep them happy. All of these beds were near the super-successful rattlesnake plantain.

I made a special big bed out back of the privy, using birch logs to hold it in. I created the soil by mixing some hardwood sawdust I had saved, some sand, some leaves I had cut up with a scissors, a dollop of limestone, a little gravel, and a couple of wheelbarrow loads of soil from the woods down across the road where the soil is less acid. Such a new, raw bed is supposed to sit two to three years to get properly mixed by organisms, but with so much wild woods soil in it I started using it right away. I needed it for a test bed; and to tuck in plants ~~xxxxxxxxxx~~ for

which I didn't have a suitable bed ready, to put in any plants which I found to be unhappy where I had tried them but didn't have anything better ready. In other words it would be a heeling-in bed and the equivalent of a convalescent hospital for any plants not doing well. But I started it off by putting into it the few wild ginger plants I had, a few mayapple, and some of the white trillium in case what I had planted elsewhere weren't happy. Everything I put into it grew to gellumpin' size, which I feel, in some cases, spoils the dainty, fragile-look of many wildligns. Gradually, as I made other beds, I moved some of them out. But I knew that bed wouldn't remain so dependable too long, for it was under spruces and balsams which dripped their needles into it, giving me the added chore of scraping up the acid needles periodically.

One day when I ^was eating lunch by one of the long windows, out of the woodsy area the other side of the lane hopped a snowshoe hare and set in the lane. After the cottontails I was accustomed to seeing down Connecticut way, it looked huge. It reminded me of the hare in Alice In Wonderland; I probably would only have blinked once if he had taken a watch out of his pocket and looked at the time. It was great to have him out there, living in nature with me.

Eventually, the spruce and balsam needles began to get to me. I knew I had to find a way to outwit their piling up on neutral-soil wildflower beds while facing the fact that I was living in a boreal forest. There was a large, open spot out back of the cabin, where I finally ^decided to erect a lath house. That would permit the wildflowers to have partial sun, yet I could control the soil as no needles would be dropping into it. Windfall balsams provided posts, and poles across the top. I bought several bundles of lath, painted them gray green, and gradually ^ailed them up, their own width apart, to form a shade house. Underneath I put in beds for the

hepaticas, downy yellow violets, bloodroot, yellow ladyslippers, wind
 senmone and some of the red trillium, though the ^Fred trillium seemed to do
 well no matter where I put them. At last I had beds in partial shade,
 simulating the broken shade of the woods, without a shower of needles coming
 down on them incessantly.

One of the rock piles which the farmer who preceded me had placed
 around the base of a big sugar maple out beyond the privy, the big old
 tree now being dead, had much partridgeberry and mosses growing over the
 ricks. I added columbine and polypody fern, which turned into a real
 nature garden. Not far from one side of the tree bole I planted white
 baneberries, and round the other side of the bole re baneberries.

I finally got to work on the outside of the cabin. The trim was
 red, with paint which was peeling off. Having inherited a metal ladder, I
 put a lot of time and energy into scraping off the old paint. That was a
 tedious job, especially when I got to the window frames. For new paint I
 chose a gray-green, wanting something which would help the cabin look even
 more as if it grew there. Whatever I chose it had to make up for the gray-
 white-black mottled shingles which covered the cabin; I knew I might
 never be able to afford to replace those asbestos shingles. The trim had
 to make the difference.

When you choose a paint color you are far away in a store where
 you have to use what's in your mind's eye. I went through the shades of ~~green~~
 green which were either already in cans, or had to be mixed via a formula.
 Green, like blue, can come in an amazing number of shades, from Kelly green to
 a dark evergreen green. I finally settled on a gray-green which seemed
 about right. I didn't want to be wrong, for I was having to get it mixed,
 meaning I couldn't return it. I almost felt I was gambling on the color.

It was too late in the day to do anything about it when I got home,
 but the next morning, after the dew had dried off, I set the ladder up
 against the cabin at the front end and climbed up aways. I had to duck

under a swooping larch branch. Then, having already removed the lid and stirred the paint, I smiled in happy surprise as the paint on the brush which I had just dipped into the can was almost if not identical to the silvery green of the larch needles! If I had tried to find a deliberate match I couldn't have done better. I have known for a long time that I have good color-vision. Often I could see shades variations which weren't obvious to others. Could it be that I'd had the color of those larches, of which there were four in that part of the yard, in my color-memory without realizing it? I did much wondering.

I was able to reach all of the cabin trim ~~xxxx~~ with the ladder, except along the peaks back and front of the building. But that proved to be no problem. I climbed up on the roof, lay down and reached over. It worked.

One day when I was up on the ladder a car drove down the lane along my western border. As I'd never seen a car in there before I thought I better go over and investigate. It proved to be a young-middle age couple who said they owned that piece of land in there, adjacent to mine. They said they owned it since he was a boy, when his father used to take him camping in there. I asked if they might want to sell it someday, as I wanted to expand some of my wildflower beds in that direction. They said they wanted to keep it until they are old, for sentimental reasons, but as they just lived up in Millinocket they gave me their name and address.

I went back to my painting under the tall, swooping larch branch, thinking that ~~for~~ I was going to grow ancient-old before they approached old age. I have never been very fond of larches, partly because they seem to be always dripping something; either broken branch tips, or their needles, for they are deciduous. Unlike the evergreen conifers, this conifer dropped its needles every fall. I had to admit they were

decorative dead needles for they completely covered my driveway in the fall with a carpet of golden color. Living close to them when painting the house I became a little more familiar with them, for their needles are very soft and delicate. The needles occur in small rosettes, and as I brushed them out of my way now and then I found myself wishing I could pluck off ~~me~~ one of those silver-green rosettes and pin it on to my lapel, or my blouse. One day when I was walking down the trail out back, past the sphagnum moss area where were the pitch^e plants, I saw something sparkling in the sun like a jewel on the left side of the trail, about four feet above ground. Wondering what in the world it could be, for there were only small trees, bush size, along the trail edge there, I walked up to the glittering thing, which was showing red and pink and green lights. It was a raindrop in the center of a larch rosette. It ~~it~~ ^{had} rained briefly in the morning. Standing there, staring at it, I had to admit it looked like a jewel from the crown of some Arabian prince.

~~xxxxxxx~~ There was one adverse experience to living in the woods during most of the growing season, and that was the little black flies. These tiny, pesky critters make their appearance about mid May, are in full possession of the world during the summer, and just gradually fade in the fall until frost lays them down at last. They are just a little too large to get through mosquito netting, but much too small to swat. They are clever at getting down inside the neck of clothing, and up inside one's ^{legs} slacks. Their bite is slightly painful first, then itchy; they don't sting like a bee, or jab a proboscis blood-sucking device into you like a mosquito; what they do, however, is a tad worse, for they snip out a perfectly round bit of your flesh, skin included. Which is why it hurts as well as itches. If you don't tuck your slacks bottoms into your socks, you soon have a mess of little round holes in your ankles. Usually it takes two pairs of sock to foil them.

I soon learned to sew a skirt around the bottom of my headnet, in order

to tuck it down into my collar, which permitted me to stretch it over a broad-brimmed hat to keep it off my nose.

I happen to be fond of dragonflies; several of them had been zooming up down the back side of the cabin, as if they had made an alleyway of it. One day I became aware that one of them was circling around my head when I was out in the back yard near the end of their "runway." I found out what he was up to by standing still and watching him closely. He was scooping up, one at a time, the little black flies which were hovering around my head trying to get into the headnet. I was an easy source of a meal ticket for that dragonfly. It made me wonder if that was what they were ^{cahsing after in} flying up and down that area, but I never proved to myself that there were more black flies out back of the cabin than anywhere else.

I used to be concerned about them getting into the house for they could easily crowd in when I opened the door though they were so small I wouldn't notice them. But I learned they are real flies in that they head for windows, where there is more light. I did find them sometimes in window-glass corners, but never once did a little black fly bite me in the house.

I had often heard of the mosquitos of Maine, and had expected to have problems with them. I always try to avoid using poison sprays no matter where I am, including when camping. I don't want that poison on my skin, I don't want to breathe it, and I don't want to get into wild soil. I would be very much annoyed to have poison sprays get into my wildflower soils.

But as it turned out, I had ^{very} little mosquito problem at my cabin. They appeared about mid May, the same time as the black flies, but they lasted only two and a half to three weeks, and were not numerous. Then they were gone for the year. This was a relief. But I never let bugs spoil my enjoyment of the outdoors. They can always be outwitted one way or another.

One successful effort at outwitting them cost me a bit, but I found

a previous year's style lawn tent on sale. It was quite large, with four walls of nylon netting which was so fine even the no-see-ums, the smallest of the pesky biters, couldn't get in. I set it up just inside the woods at the back end of the backyard, where it was shady in summer and captured faint breezes from the overtopping spruces, one of which was a very tall, mature tree. I put a card table in it, folding lawn chairs, a cot with pad, and the sterno stove. I also had an old camp candle heater that held a small pan to keep tea hot. I ate many a meal out there, foiling the mosquitos and the little black flies.

I thought I was licked by the biting pests when the no-see-ums got into the cabin early one evening. I just couldn't see them, at least not without a time-wasting effort. But their bites were like fire on my arms and legs. I knew enough about insect anatomy to surmise that if there were some way in which I could smother their breathing spiracles that might conquer them. It was much too warm to light the fireplace and encourage smoke to get into the rooms. I went into Old Town the next day and bought the best thing I could find, - a small package of incense triangles. I tried putting ^{one of} them in a small dish on the floor that early evening when ~~they~~ the no see-ums appeared again. The incense worked like magic. Later I remembered some mosquito punk I had stashed away in the car. I brought that in a couple of days later, lit it, and presto, the end of the no-see-ums.

Although in a way May is my favorite month, for it proclaims with its opening buds and the leafing out of trees that winter is well behind us, and glorious summer is just up ahead, already ~~being~~ announced by the sudden appearance of wildflowers popping up ^from the dead debris of the past growing season, May can be a very wet and chilly month. But I loved the almost frenetic activity of getting new wildflower beds dug, plants transplanted, adventuring in the ~~er~~ woods for new wildflower species, moving last year's compost onto or into the beds. Late April and May have ~~always~~ reminded me of the Mad

Better. The season was always too short for all that needed to be done during the spring transplanting season. June would be too late. As May drew to a close I always wished I could put out a hand and stop the planet from its tilting gain on the summer solstice.

But the first week in June did arrive, and as usual the whole world smelled like a rose garden. Apple blossoms had ~~been~~ passed by, but other trees were in bloom. Chokecherry was out, I had three lilac blossoms still in bloom. Pine and balsam essences floated on the air, and nature had many things in bloom in woods and fields. Everything was such a bright green I felt, as I always did at this season, that I could smell the green.

A dry spell had been on for several days. I knew I couldn't carry water for the whole vegetable garden and the wildflower beds, so I cut grass with my little old fashioned hand m^oower, which I'd hung onto since Massachusetts ~~days~~ days, and pulled weeds out of all garden bes^es, and tucked weeds and clippings around most of the plants. By doling out water miserly to each plant, and tucking the weeds and clippings up around it as shading mulch I kept most of them happy. Those in the shady woods didn't need so much attention, but I did tuck some old leaves around them.

I took a chance and planted a final set of beans. Swiss chard and turnips were up, but I couldn't find the carrots, an easy-to-grow vegetable which never gave me any trouble before. They could have dessiccate^d when they first sprouted. Otherwise it was surprising to find so much alive in such heat and dryness. Squash, cucumbers, pepper and tomato plants, - some had wilted a bit but with care they survived. I even brought the water from defrosting the refrigerator out to the petunias and sw^et williams which I had started on the south side^f of the cabin. All water from the rain barrel had long since been used up. I either drove or pulled the wagon every day to the pump at Crocker Turn.

Being New England, it did eventually rain again. A gentle June rain. Usually June is a dry month, and this one was to start out. But

then it turned the tables on itself and rained for day-long stretches, often as heavy showers. I was thankful, for I had reached the stage of pampering the cardinal flowers every day, for they prefer to grow with their feet in a brook. The same with the blue lobelias, though they will thrive in a relatively dry flower bed. I needn't have worried about the vegetable garden or the wildflower beds. They all got more than enough to satisfy their thirst before June was out. But the rain did slow down the painting of the house trim, which I only worked at now and then.

Then the berry season was upon me again. The blood root up the road were beginning to pop their seeds so I had to go gather those, for if planted right after they ripen they will come up the next year, but if you wait ~~until~~ until they dry it takes three years for them to germinate. I planted them in a flat, covered it with wire to keep out wild beasties like woods mice, then planted it in the ground up to its rim. Then returned to making endless jars of jam, for ripe berries won't wait, either.

Every now and then I dropped my tasks, hopped into the car, and just went out woods ~~roads~~ roads. I'd heard power saws off in the woods to the east when I was up on the ladder ⁿ painting. So off I went, as close as I could get to the direction of the sound. I found a whole new section of forest cut over where piles of ten foot logs were stacked alongside the road. Was this for pulp, or lumber? There was a butt log so big I didn't see how they were going to get it up on the truck. No one was around of whom I could ask questions. As I'd hoped, there were several pieces of fireplace size, which I gathered up. Here, as at some similar places, I found several wedge-shaped pieces of wood, which apparently are deliberately discarded by the woods cutters. They were fine for backlog pieces for the fireplace, as they could be stood on end, and smaller pieces set in front of them.

Another time I needed some soil to mix with some compost, and as I didn't want to remove soil from the vegetable garden, and digging soil in the woods means a tussle with tree roots, I drove southward down the gravel road to where I had seen a small gravel pit. There it was easy to fill two plastic pails with loose gravel ~~just~~ ^{from just} ~~XX~~ ^{under} the grass at the top where there was a bit of natural humus present. As on all such jaunts, when my task was done, I explored around among hillocks along the road. There was a small clearing back of the gravel pit where it looked as if trees had been cut a few years before. Knowing such opening up to the light often encourages smaller plants to ~~come~~ ^{come} in I explored this small open swath. I wasn't too surprised to find a new species for my wild beds, several plants of round-^aleaved yellow violets. I hadn't seen those in years, not since a trip to Vermont a long time ago. Abiding by my own self-imposed rule, I left more than I took. But gloated over what I did take. Almost every such trip away from my cabin area netted me something, even if only a ^e ~~piece~~ ^{piece} of firewood. I always arrived home with my idea of "treasure."

The day came when I faced up to the chore of putting on a new roof. When my friend Paul had set up the fireplace chimney he said then that the green asbestos shingles were getting quite weathered. He had put new ones around the base of the chimney. It was bad enough to scrape together enough money with which to buy shingles, but to have to hire someone to do it was out of the question. I decided to tackle it myself. I'd always wanted to get up there and walk around on that roof; now I had a good reason to do so. Paul told me what to buy, and I found everything I needed in one of those fabulous lumber companies down in Bangor. But I only bought a half a roof's covering needs to start with. Paul eventually drove it up to me in his pick-up.

I soon found that because asbestos shingles come in sheets of three in a row, they were heavy. I couldn't carry more than one sheet at a time up the ladder. But by tying a rope to three or four, I could haul them up. With a

a can of roofing nails and hammer in one hand, and holding tight to a sheet of shingles with the other, I moved up the roof from eaves to center ridge, following Paul's instructions. The task proved much easier than I had dared hope. The hardest job was keeping the can of nails from shoot-the-shooting down off the roof. Later I realized I should have had a carpenter's apron with nail pockets. The roof, unlike the trim painting, was a job I had to stick with, lest rain get in where I ripped off the old ones.

I had been hearing the wonderful musical chords of a hermit thrush just in off the car lane near the apple tree, down the path to the white trillium. The thrush began flying into the yard at the beginning of that trail; often I saw him flush from the ground as I came into the area. It was a wonderful privilege to have this glorious songster living there with me. But I was soon to have an almost broken heart over him.

Late one afternoon I started to walk down that trail to check on the partridgeberry and Clintonia bed. Just as I stepped past a bush which had screened my view, I flushed a bird; it dashed past me and toward a storm door I had stood by the corner of the house until I had time to repair it. I heard the little thud as the bird hit something. I thought it had hit the rainbarrel. I walked over to the spot, and saw a tiny bird fluttering its wings at the bottom of the storm door. The little bird, in its fright at meeting me coming into the trail just as it was flying out of the trail, had panicked and darted ahead instead of landing ^{on the lane} as it usually did. I reached down to pick it up. It was the hermit thrush.

Its wings were wide open and slightly trembling. I went over to the back step and sat down with it, sitting it on the top step, hoping that the feel of my hand wouldn't frighten it further. I hoped it was only stunned. Its mouth was open, it has half gagging half gasping. I moved away from the step for a moment, hoping it would come to and not see me. The wings folded up. But the bird remained still. I stepped over closer and saw that

its eyes were closed. I sat beside it awhile, but there was no sign of it being alive. After awhile I picked it up, and couldn't feel the heart beat. The little bird never revived. I tried to feel if its neck were broken, but all the vertebrae seemed intact. No doubt it had suffered brain damage, when it hit that hard door. Though I had considerable skill at skinning small birds for museum specimens I had no heart to perform any autopsy on this one. I put him in a plastic bag and then into the freezer compartment of my refrigerator. Eventually I got up him to the university, where at least his handsome feathers could be preserved for some time as a museum number^ed and named specimen. I never again heard a hermit thrush song at my Maine cabin.

I took time off at one point to run up to Millinocket to visit a friend. I started early in the morning, so I would have time to look along the roadsides up there for wildflowers. I had seen much fireweed up that way in the past, as well as pearly everlasting^s. But neither fit into a wildgarden, except ^{example} as specimens. But I came across several stands of painted trillium. I knew where there was a small stand of these down Milford way but had never wanted to dig any of them for they are one of the species difficult to transplant. But as there were hundreds of them here I decided to bring a dozen of them home.

When I got them back to the cabin I planted them in two different places in the woods beyond the back yard, where, as far as one's eyes could tell, the habitats looked identical to what I had taken them out of. But, though some blossomed the next year, all behaved like pink ladyslippers, dwindling in size until they disappeared. Someday someone will unlock the secret of how to make such species happy when moved to similar environments. Sometimes I suspect microclimate plays a role, but that's guessing.

I often spent evenings, and rainy noon hours catching up on reading.

Especially when it was chilly enough to have the fireplace going. It was at such times that I would burn a special piece of wood which I had saved for a moment when I could give special attention to its giving up of ^{its} cosmic energy. It often happened that a piece of wood came my way which was so different, or a choice piece of firewood like a piece of hickory, probably the best firewood in the world, that I would hang onto it like a treasured friend. I would keep moving it out of the way of ordinary pieces, until one day I'd decide I couldn't hang onto it forever. For awhile they etched their shape into my mind so it would seem that I would never forget them, then I would burn ^{one} ~~it~~ as if marking ceremonial time, and along would come another choice piece and my eyes would love that one while forgetting the last one I burned. A rather fickle process but it enhanced some of my cozy reading moments.

Shortly after I came to live there, the town passed what were called copycat laws, patterned after new laws in some other states. They required that homes have foundations under them and plumbing in them. But the many back-country dwellers, whose families had been living in Maine for a hundred and fifty years, in homes with few modern conveniences, were exempted by what was called a grandfather clause. I was very lucky to have moved into my cabin when I did, for I never could have afforded to put a foundation under it or drill a well and put in plumbing, either one of which would have cost more than my whole place did.

Because I knew that birds would be my major visitors during the winter months when I stayed home, I built a substantial feeder just outside the window between the refrigerator and the fireplace. It was a tray two and a half feet by three feet, over which I built a superstructure, with roof and slatted sides to keep out the countless red squirrels which hung around the area. The back of it I enclosed with chicken wire, so

I could see what went on out there. When I had time to do so, I could see every bird which came, and which left, the feeder, by just sitting at an angle in the rocker by Miranda. I had first learned by having an open feeding tray^{that} I was feeding red squirrels, not birds. From one to three of them would sit on the tray stuffing their faces, and not a bird able to get in for a seed. I couldn't afford that very long. But once I closed out the squirrels, chickadees and nuthatches were my primary visitors; but every now and then I had purple finches and red-breasted grosbeaks out there. Occasionally a small flock of evening grosbeaks passed through.

It was late in September that I had some occasion to empty a basin of water in the sink; just as I flipped it I saw a drowned crane fly lying on the water surface. In reflex, without time to think, I grabbed for the crane fly and scooped him out of the water, hoping to catch him before he washed down the drain; then, assuming he was^dead I slipped him back into the last bit of water in the basin, when I saw a leg move. I put on my glasses, the better to see him, and saw only the usual very long skinny legs which stretched out like miniature giraffe legs, with drowned-looking wings at the top of them. He was so utterly fragile-looking I didn't dare pick him up. But again a leg moved a bit. He was absolutely flat. As flat as a sheet of paper.

But he must be alive, to be able to move a leg. By now I had picked up a paper napkin; carefully I drained out the rest of the water from the basin, almost to the last drop, then I blotted the rest with the napkin. I got out a thin knife from a nearby drawer and tried to lift him up but I was afraid of squashing him. Then a leg lifted up and bent at the knee and waved around. I grabbed a new, dry paper napkin and held a corner of it to the moving foot. He grasped the paper! Carefully, as if my own life depended upon it, I lifted him up; by now both feet were clinging to the paper napkin. I carried him, slowly, dangling in the air, his one pair of wings outspread, over to the warmth in front of the fireplace which happened

to be burning, and hung him gingerly in front of it, like a piece of clothing hung up to dry. To my amazement he shook himself like a wet dog, I was holding my empty hand under him in case he let go. But he sort of swung around and stood up on the napkin. I felt that not only had his very thin wings dried out in the fireplace warmth, but some of his breathing spiracles must have also. There he was, but moments before a drowned crane-fly in a basin of water, now standing up on a dry paper napkin. I laid him and the napkin on the table. Looking him over I saw that he had but five skinny legs. As all insects have six legs I walked over to the sink. There was the sixth, in the bottom of the basin. A paraplegic crane-fly, with no hope of a pro^sthesis.

I had to h^urry off to town and left him on the napkin on the table. When I returned he was gone; I never saw him again. I sort of hoped he was in some well c^ranny up behind the gun pegs, settled in for the winter.

I was about to spend my first winter in the cabin, knowing I would spend most of the time writing for yard work, other than snow^shoeveling, was over until spring. On Thanksgiving Day I looked up from my typewriter to glance out the long window on the far side of the fireplace. What I saw made me blink. Perched on the now leafless wild apple tree across the lane, just a few feet from the cabin, were three partridge, in the lower branches. It wasn't Christmas, and it wasn't a pear tree, but song filled the air. Those partridges looked so huge, compared to the chickadees, they didn't seem quite real. Yet they soon started preening. And before long all three flew off. I had just about looked up in time to see them.

Later that afternoon it started to snow. I went out for awhile, to revel in it and to check if my snowshovel was at hand. The car was in the drive^way, back out of the way, its hood well wrapped, for the radio told me this snow was about to arrive. I thought about it awhile, while standing

loving the snowflakes ^{with} ~~over~~ my eyes. Then I got the car keys and moved the car to the small parking space I had made by removing young trees. The snowplow would need to get in, so my car mustn't be in the way.

When indoors I was confined to the center room for the winter. There was no door, that I could close, on the entrance to the front porch. To close it in I hung a three-layer barrier against the cold. First I hung up a large blanket. Then I fastened a sheet of plastic over the whole opening, tacking it down. In front of that on the center room side I hung a large, long old maroon portiere I had found somewhere. It added a rather cheerful color to the sameness of the pine panelling. I laid an old small rug across the bottom of it all, to make sure no drafts got through.

The entrance to the back room did have a door, which I had painted the color of the pine walls. And of course that led into the back room, which had the ~~exit~~ door to the outdoors. It was through those two doors that I learned came drafts when the wind was in the east or southeast. Even a rug across the bottoms of them didn't keep the east draft out. Those were the days I put my feet in the oven, but they were few.

The man who plowed out the driveways down below ^dagree_A t o do mine at the same time. I never did have any trouble getting out of there, but if I had ^tthough_A tusseling with logging trucks out on the main road was a challenge, that was driving on a grand concourse compared to driving on narrow back country roads in competition with the loggers. The town snowplows were very diligent and prompt about keeping the road open, but they threw the snow up into walls what left no where else to go if a big truck came along and the road didn't look wide enough. I learned that even the natives pulled their car as close as they could to the snow wall then stopped, and waited for the truck to go by. It was much better to lose a little time than to cause an over-zealously driven load of logs tip over on your car and you. Some of those log drivers would just as soon scare away all private

cars away. In their minds, those roads were built for them. The trouble was, they were partly right.

It does snow often in that part of Maine; but the beauty of fresh new flakes falling down on the evergreen spruces and balsams was a breath-taking scene which never spells. It was like living in the middle of a Christmas card. I often entertained myself by pretending I was being snowed in far up in northern Alaska, that I was entirely dependent upon my own ingenuity to survive. Of course there I was, with a telephone, ~~xxxxxxxxxxxx~~

~~xxxxxxxxxxxx~~ and there ~~xxxxxxxxxxxx~~ were a couple of snowmobile owners not far up the gravel road just beyond Crocker Turn. But, I was really alone, for the few people down in the settlement below had gone to Florida. I had always wanted to try living alone in the north woods, and here I was. And I was very, very comfortable, with enough food in the house for at least a month, and firewood stacked outside the door and armloads of it inside. The oil men had filled my barrels two days ago. Let it snow, let it snow, let it snow.

Most evenings, as I refused to type in the evening, I listened to radio music while I read books from the University library, or caught up with my own books, bought mostly at rummage sales; I had dozens of magazines such as National Geographic, Sierra, Atlantic Monthly, Readers Digest and Natural History. I was not living a Tobacco Road life. I was living a cultured, simple, self-sufficient Henry Thoreau life, the life of an educated Cro-Magnon.

The first winter slipped away faster than I had expected. Other than the birds I'd had no visitors, but of course when I went to town after groceries or to the laundromat, I stopped to have tea with Vivian and Wilfrid, with Paul and his mother Fran, and with Barbara. It was always great to see them and catch up with their news. I was always glad to get back to my cozy cabin in the woods. I felt like a woods mouse returning to its nest.

In no time it was March. I looked out at a very snowy world, where the snow was nearly five feet on the level; standing there pondering it, a beautiful purple finch walked in through the slats on the feeding tray, his colors enhanced by the pure white background. The finch moved from the feeder out onto a branch of the nearby elder bush. He looked like a lavender pink rose against the snowy background. I had seen those birds summer-dusting in the County Road so knew they were permanent residents, although some might move a bit at migration time. Yet I had never seen one act as if it were nesting, or feeding young, in spring or summer.

Later that same day I happened to look out the back window behind my couch in time to see two pine grosbeaks on the ground out there, where wind had brushed a bare patch on the ground; they, too, were very colorful in among the dead weeds and the snow background. While watching them, and looking at the piles of snow everywhere, I was glad I was not down by the river any more. I still missed what went on along a river, but not enough to regret I had chosen a site high and dry in the Maine woods.

I had done a lot of shoveling during the winter, for exercise and to have convenient paths. One path, of course, was to the privy. Another to the furthest wood pile. And I kept my little parking lot shoveled out, though the plow men did the worst of that. And of course the path ~~off~~ ^{XXXXX} the ~~privy~~ path to the chopping block. The snowplow swung around in back of the cabin, so the backyard close to the back steps was well plowed.

When spring came I learned I must never again throw any snow that I dug onto spots where there was a wildflower bed. Such stacked snow is pecked snow; it doesn't have the air spaces in it which snow dropped in place by nature has. I found myself digging snow off of a couple of beds the first week in May. Some ice had formed under the snow, and couldn't melt until I got the snow off of it. I feared the plants would be winter-killed but they weren't.

Every spring the wildflowers are more welcome than ever. The older I get, the more I work with them, the more they are like familiar old friends. Once in awhile I talk to them. Like the schoolboy who claimed he could make plants grow big and strong by talking nice to them, and make them droop by frowning at them. Very few wild plants would I frown at, other than something like poison ivy, of which there was almost none around that part of Maine, or bedstraw, which leans all over the other vegetation, ~~and~~ of which some was gradually spreading around down by the gravel road.

Each year I return to the work with them, more dedicated than ever to their cause, to be their Johnny Appleseed, to help spread them rather than destroy them. Some of us have to be caring, for if as many wildflower spots which have been destroyed out of existence since I was young ~~wild~~ continue to be destroyed in the next two or three generations of humans, there just won't be wildflowers for future people.

Because I had decided I wanted to develop my wildflower-growing into a nursery again, having had such a nursery several years in the past, I realized that I had to have some place where I could bring plants in out of the wet and cold and package them. I had already tried doing that in the little back room of the cabin, but no matter how careful I was, I tracked in soil, needles and leaves into the house. As I had no garage or shed, I set out by the small parking lot I had created, one day, with pad and pencil, and drew a sketch of a packing shed, which I knew could also be storage for firewood. I thought that if I used standard size two-by-fours for the framework, it could be quite simple. And as I drew a picture of the shed I could see that I could leave one end open so I could drive the front end of my car into the building, out of wind and snow.

I decided I could make the building 16 ft. long by using two lengths of 8 foot two-by-fours, eight feet being a standard length. The uprights could be eight feet at the back, and cut down a foot or so at the front so the

roof could slant like an ordinary shed roof from front to back, and as the building would be only eight feet wide, then all the roof rafters could also be eight feet long. The back of the building would run along parallel to the lane which ran in to the Millinocket people's land. The front would face my little parking lot, so it would be easy to deliver or pick^{up} something to and from the shed. I decided I should try it. Certainly a crude structure for such uses was better than none.

There is nothing like making up your mind to do something then plunging in and getting it done, for each step accomplished leads to the next until suddenly it is done. It was my good fortune that I chose this time to start it for when I got to a Bangor lumber yard to inquire the price of two-by-fours I walked right into a sale on slightly^d defective lumber. They were half the normal price. I got enough of the two-by-fours so I could make a double sill of them around the bottom, equal to four-by-fours but at far less cost. It was some pile of lumber I had, what with enough two-by-fours for the studs, the sills, to tie everything together around the top edges, and the roof rafters. And I had them advise me what size nails, Once more ~~z~~ Paul came to my r_escue and drove them up for me.

Now I was in my glory for I love sawing wood and hammering at nails, I was fully aware of being inexperienced, and having to use by guess by gosh with some of it. One thing I did know; I am not good at toenailing and that would be a needed skill here. My hands just are not big enough and strong enough to hold two two-by-fours together at opposite angles, or even close angles, to hold them in place while knocking them out of place with the hammer. I already knew that I could and would drive a nail in at ^wrong angle and cause a piece of wood to ^psplit off the edge of the two-by-four. But, I wasn't out to win any prize with the structure. I just wanted some walls and a roof, and I was sure I could make them stand up.

Though my little Eden among the firs and spruces was in off the the through road, hidden on a little plateau surrounded by the evergreens,

I had many visitors during the amenable seasons. Every one of them who came to see me while that shed was going up wanted to help, and most did. All but the toe-nailing. Somehow, no one ever came along who had expertise at that. Not even someone to hold the two pieces together while I whacked. They just didn't arrived during that part of the construction. A girl acquaintance stopped in just as I need^{ed} someone to help me^{raise} the framed sections, which I had done on the ground. I like^d this stage best, for it reminded me of Henry Thoreau's raising of his Walden Pond cabin. I knew I wouldn't have such notables to help, for he had Emerson, a couple of magazine editors and other such people. I don't even remember the name of the gal who helped me raise mine. She was a recent escape from a convent, as it were, a friend of Barbara's. But she did hold up the frames until I attached them with a temporary piece of the wood at the tops of their joints. I put braces on both sides of them all to make sure they stayed put until I could find a way to fastened them securely enough to lean a ladder against them.

The next day I was glad no carpenter was around to see me standing on a chair to secure them. I just didn't dare lean against them with a ladder. But, ingenuity gets things done, if not professionally every time. And, of course, nailing everything at the bottom help^d keep eve^{ry}thing firm. The double pieces for sills worked fine. But the studs at the north end had a bit of a curve to them, testimony to my brand of toenailing.

The next help came from men who were remodeling the house down below. My neighbor in the nearby camp, who lived in Bucksport, had^{earlier, having heard the hammering,} come over/to look at what I was doing. He said, "Follow me." He led me to a tree he said would make a good rooftree, or cross-beam across the front edge of the roof. He promised he would have it for me by the next weekend. That was when the men down below came in handy. They went over and got the felled tree, carried it over between them, four of them, and hoisted it up to the top front edge. I was boggled eyed watching two of them get up there, and hammer

it securely in place, for both were tall, solid men. That my shed framework would hold them without collapsing was beyond my own ken. If it would hold them maybe I wouldn't have to worry about the weight of snow on the frame.

Then along came my city friends, Gladys and Shirley, just as I was ready to set a window into the center of the back framework, which I had prepared to hold the window, as I wanted some natural light for working in that area. As if on cue, they came into the yard just in time to hoist up the window so I could push it into place. This was one case where toenailing was easy; I just hammered a nail into the frame on all sides, then bent it against the window to hold it there firmly. As I wasn't fooling around with raising and lowering kind of sash, the window was put in more or less permanently. The window itself I had found leaning against the back of the privy, braced up on a couple of old boards. All the glass was intact. I had dried out the frame in the sun, as it had gotten damp and ^{was} almost at the edge of beginning to rot. Then I painted it with left-over pine-colored paint. With its panes washed it looked like a new window.

I decided to put the roof on before closing in the walls, in case of rain. My Bucksport neighbor beckoned me once more to his yard; he led me to a pile of old boards under a big tree, and said "Take any of those. They will rot before I get around to using them." His boards, plus three or four I already had gleaned elsewhere, and two that I found in the dump, covered the roof. I was up there nailing down the first ones when into the yard came one of my students. Johnny was a Thoreau devotee. He took one look, climbed up and finished the roof for me. He returned a couple of days later, and unrolled and nailed down the green tar roofing material I had bought.

I was debating what would be the cheapest material to buy for siding when the men working down below came up and dumped a pile of left-over pieces of the tan-yellow heavy, outside plywood/they had covered the whole house down there ~~with~~ with which. Some of the pieces were the exact length to fit between posts, eight feet. They covered about two thirds of the structure. A part of

the back, and all of the south end, I covered with the odds and ends of pieces. It looked a bit patchy but the general effect at that end was modified by the fact that the patches were all the same material and color. And, who should come along, to put up most of that siding? Major!

Later I was given many pieces of indoor plywood, and I had a few of my own left over for the plywood walls inside the cabin. I used them to cover the inside studs of the shed, which made a double wall against wind and cold. It did look patchy inside, but as far as I was concerned, that added to the character of the shed.

I left the front south half, or eight feet, open so I could drive the front of my car in there in bad winter weather. Also, that made it easy to push the wheelbarrow in and out, and for pulling in the water wagon. No sooner was the shed up than I started stacking firewood against the ^{inner} walls of the north half. At last I had a place to get the ^dcordwood in out of the rain.

Then, as I had done down at Thoreau Carry, I cut a hole big enough for brooder size stovepipe in a piece of metal, covered a foot-square hole in the back wall with it, and had Major bring in the log woodburner from under its storage place under a folded canvas. That canvas was still usable for a covering over the big open doorway if ever I wanted to work in there and have the stove going.

Along the back, inside wall, almost its full length. I put in a work bench, or counter for packing plants or any other shed work. The left ^fhand half I hitched to hinges, and held its front wedge up with braces. Thus I could drop that counter down when I wanted to pull the car front-end in there. The counter to the right I ^{ed}nailed in as a permanent ^xfixture. Under that counter I had already started stacking firewood.

To add a bit of firmness to the structure, I scraped out some of the soil from under the sills, and with the back of my hatchet, hammered stones

as there were many rather flat ones available in the stone piles out in the woods back of the privy. The shed was protected from wind by a small stretch of woods on the west side, and by real forest on the north and south sides. There was the cabin, a cluster of balsams and spruces and the big larches to the east. I felt that only a freak wind could get in there and beat it up.

I was surprised, a bit amused, and more than a trifle concerned when suddenly a group of town officials, including one woman, with clip boards in hand walked through the entrance of my lane, and over to where I happened to be doing something in front of the new shed. One of the men, in very soft, trying-to-be-kind voice said, "We heard you built a new building in here, but we haven't a town ~~xxxx~~ permit filed on it." I waved my hand at the shed.

"I put stone foundation under it," I said, in a dubious but hopeful tone, "pointing to the stones I had hammered under ^{the} sills. "I built the thing with my own lily white hands," I added. I could see repressed smiles in some mouth corners. "It won't win an architectural prize. I didn't think it was worth reporting to Town Hall. It's mostly a wood shed."

They let smiles spread across their faces as they dropped their clip boards down to their sides. Obviously, they too, didn't think it was worth taking notes on. They apologized and walked away in silence. I stood watching them disappear out the entrance of the lane. Maine officialdom understood Maine backwoods living. After all, just a few feet east or south of where they had been standing was Unorganized Territory. I was on the interface between bureaucracy and Henry Thoreau's wild Maine woods. There was probably some phrase in the new grandfather ^{for} law which they could have gotten me on. I shrugged my shoulders and walked in freedom back to the cabin, feeling something like a cat being caught with a bird but being allowed to keep the bird.

As I approached the bird feeder and saw a couple of chickadees flying out from it I was reminded ~~xxxx~~ of a day when, before all of the siding had closed in the shed, and I was working inside, under the roof., a group of five

the
 or six little chickadees flew inside, under roof, and landed in various spots, clinging to rafters, hopping onto the ladder which was against the largefront opening, just fluttering around, obviously^y up to something. They were quiet, except for the flutter of their wings, and they kept fluttering, from one spot to another. Except for swallows, it was unusual for small birds to come in under a roof. And all the time I had been working out there, none of them had come near me out there. Then I realized they seemed to be telling me something. At that time the feeding tray was still open. Just in case I was right, I decided to walk back to the cabin. Sure enough, two red squirrels were sitting on the tray; the little chickadees flew back with me and perched in the elder by the tray^s, watching me. Usually, if I came out of the cabin and any of them were in the elder they flew off. This time they stayed put. I chased off the squirrels, and as I went around the corner into the house I could see the little birds hop from the elder onto the tray.

Birds aren't supposed to have brains to figure things out. They are supposed to just react to instinct, to patterns of behavior learned over millenⁿia. But a bird researcher, Margaret Nice, drew a lot of criticism as well as interest with her reports on bird behavior. She had^p allowed small birds into her house, having spread newspapers all over the floor and furniture. She proved, at least to her own satisfaction, that when she confronted them with a problem which never would have occurred in the wild, they could reason their way out or a^round it. I have alw^yays suspected this to be true of wild birds; that it is bird^s confined to pens for generations, even for hundreds of years of domestication, which have been cared for so long, protected from predators and food provided them every day, which are the ones with the "bird brains." Having^g just felt as if I myself had escaped^g from some kind of confinement, or loss of liberty which would have dulled my own wits, I revelled in the intelligence of my chickadees.

I still had a few tasks to do to finish the shed. I had deliberately not put in a center post, even though I knew that the roof would accumulate four feet or more of snow. I had brought in two windfall balsams, which I now cut to fit from the earthen floor to a spot under one of the rafters. On the top of each I nailed a small flat piece of wood, about a foot or more long. These I stood up pressed against ~~one~~^{two} of the rafters, ~~each~~, so there were two mid-center roof braces. I just lay them on the floor along a woodpile while not in use.

After Major had helped me a few times to carry water from Crocker Turn to the vegetable garden, he decided that was impractical for any future work with wildflowers. We talked over the idea of a back-hoe-dug well, for it seemed it should easily fill with water, what with that pitcher-plant wet area out back. The ground water level couldn't be too far down; it would seep into a deep-dug hole in the ground. There was much emergent rock in the back yard; I didn't think it was ledge, but even if it was just buried glacial boulders it would be just as difficult to dig into, for the more I thought about it the less space there seemed to be between the buried boulders. We might have to tear up the whole yard to find a spot. Then I remembered that the whole car lane seemed to be on rock. It could be ledge, and I didn't know any local geologist who could tell us.

One bit of discussion led to another. It seemed inevitable that we decided the safest and best answer was to drill a well. I let Major make the final decision, as he would be the one paying for ^h _^ ⁱ _i whichever we chose. Having already gone through the well-drilling process once before in my life, it seemed incredible that I was about to embark on it a second time. Few property owners have such an experience even once in their lives. But the last time was so successful, having provided us with enough water to supply a whole town, I had no real qualms about trying it again. Besides, here we

had a hundred mile aquifer to tie into. But drilling is always a risky gamble, witting rods or no witting rods.

The day did dawn, when right before my eyes out there in the backyard, a tall well-drilling derrick was silhouetted against the spruces. Here again was faith that water exists almost everywhere underground in New England, if you stick with the drilling long enough. What weighed most on my shoulders was being the one to pick THE SPOT. Whoever lived here after me would be dependent upon the wisdom of my selection. But, since one spot seemed as good as another, and I could never put faith in a bending witch hazel stick, I decided to choose a spot most convenient for me. That was next to the vegetable garden, and close to the wildflower shade house, but not too far from the cabin in case someone wanted to build a bathroom onto the back of it someday. I knew that for awhile, at least, water would have to be carried to the house; in time, an electric pump would be attached and a little pump house be built over it.

~~XX~~

Once more I found myself listening to the screeching and whining of a drilling outfit. This one ground up the rock as the bit worked its way down, the rock coming up as very small chips, and deposited around the spot like dark gray stone cornflakes. It rose up through a pipe supported in the derrick-like rig and came pouring down like the guts out of Vesuvius. I watched it burying bluets and violets which I had intended to move, covering them as Herculaneum and Vesuvius had been buried. Beyond hope of resurrection..

The drillers were in a hurry as they had another job waiting; this one was done much faster than my first, which had cut with rotary action that brought up the rock ~~XXXXXXXXXX~~ in cylinder-shaped cores. It was after dark when they hit water the third day. Off they went, leaving the rig in place with a tall transparent tube to collect any water coming up

from pressure, so they could judge what the pressure was when they came back in the morning. When they arrived in the morning the water was so high in the tube that even the experienced drillers shouted jubilantly when they saw it. "You'll never have any trouble bringing up water from this well!" one of them exclaimed. "Neither a hand pump nor an electric one will ever go dry on you!"

The flow tested out at twenty gallons a minute, ten gallons less than my first one, but then, who needs, or can store, twenty gallons a minute other than for industrial use? The water proved to be icy cold, crystal clear, and sweet; for it had been filtered through the underpinnings of that hundred miles of forest in back of me. The drillers were sure they had hit an underground stream, accounting for the great pressure.

If anyone had any doubt about how deep they had dug, they should have stood beside me and watched them pull up one fifteen foot section of stringer pipe after another and lay them in their rack along the upper sides of the rig truck. Though I stood right there and counted them, and somewhere wrote down the total, I have forgotten the depth of the well. But it was about one hundred and ^{ten}~~xxxx~~ feet. It didn't matter. It would be a long, long time before the paper mill people sold off that land back there and developed it to the point where the quantity and quality of the water degenerated.

The addition of the well made many things easier, and began some new yard activities. Major had arranged for the drillers to build a platform and install a hand pump. There had been a well handpump in my ^{summer} life in early childhood, and to have one right here in my yard called for standing back every now and then to revel in its existence. It turned out to be a never-ending source of entertainment to my city visitors. Major painted the platform and the iron pump itself, an evergreen green, which, like the house, looked as if it grew there.

One chore which I especially enjoyed was washing my hair out on the platform. I heated water in the house most of the time, but now and then on a hibachi grill. Cooled it with water which had been pumped into a bucket, which offered better control than directly from the pump. The sudsy water I tossed into the closeby spruce stand. I did much hand laundry out there, too, using regular soap rather than detergent so I could toss the used water into the trees and weeds without concern over chemicals.

The pump was in a spot which was open to the sun where much else was in the shade. When the weather was a little cool, I sometimes sat on the edge of the platform in the sun, having brought a book or my writing with me. Even mending, a chore which seems a waste of time to me, out there under the open sky, in the snug yard clearing, in a hidden niche in the Maine woods, gave me an alibi to sit out there.

The adjacent vegetable garden was the immediate beneficiary of the pump, and more than once I crowed to myself for having had the sense to put it in that spot. For by now I was growing the whole gamut of backyard vegetables, - beans, peas, radishes, carrots, cucumbers, sweet peppers, summer squash, tomatoes, broccoli and chives. Carrying water to them from this pump, while not as efficient as a hose, was far better than having to go all the way to crocker Turn, or depending on a rain barrel, as this water was unlimited. And, at last I had plenty to spare for the garden flowers along the lane by the cabin, to say nothing of the wildflowers. I still had to use the little red wagon to cart water to the woodland beds, but just to be able to have refills for the jugs without going out of the yard was a blessing.

I was soon to have company in the area. I was driving into town for groceries, having heard that the County road had been scraped, as was done twice a year to temporarily removed the pot holes, when I passed an unusual-looking house trailer which was being pulled by a pick-up truck. I had seen house trailers of all sizes and quality in Florida, but had never seen one

It was long and boxy, more like a railroad box car, yet it had some house-like trimmings near the roof. But I was heading the other way so I had only a brief glimpse of it. When I got back home later in the afternoon I heard a clumping noise over near the Millinock family property. I walked in and saw that odd trailer already in place, in the small open area of the next plot of land, the last one of the old farm which I was on. An older man, with a few days' growth of beard, was fussing at something just outside the trailer. He greeted me, told me his name, and said he had just bought that piece of land. I knew it had been in the hands of a real estate dealer and had hoped I could get it someday to prevent ~~from~~ was happening that I was now looking at..

In a way, I would have liked to have had a congenial neighbor, someone who liked to chat about anything and everything. But I could tell by looking at this new neighbor he wasn't going to be my idea of a conversationalist. He explained that he had retired from a small building business, his wife had died, and now he wanted to live out in the woods by himself. He had been dreaming of this for years.

In no time, the clearing around his trailer was cluttered with old white enamel cookstoves, ancient refrigerators, old heating stoves, odd pieces of metal, bottles, and beer cans which I could see he just threw out his front door. Like many other such dooryards I've seen along edges of wilderness areas, the trailer looked like it was sitting in the middle of the town dump. When I asked him one day what he was going to do with all those things he said he planned to use some of them to improve his trailer. I could only grieve for the violets and cinquefoil they weighted down.

He was a pleasant fellow, friendly, with a clean tongue, at least in my presence. He kept pretty much to himself, to my relief. ^{But} I have always maintained you can live a simple life in the woods without being a slob. The early settlers had little by way of possessions, but they took care of them and were known to be strict housekeepers. Every now and then

today, however, you can drive past rural yards which have so much junk piled around the place outside you wonder how they enjoy their own property. Maybe it's one way to keep from having to mow the lawn. I carted what I counted to be thirteen bushels of cans, bottles, pieces of bedsprings, parts of old stoves and furniture, to the dump from the yard I had down by the Pennobscot. And a comparable number of bushels of cans and bottles and other discarded items from back of the apple tree across from my cabin lane. I knew where there^e was other junk, like bedsprings, hidden under the trees in the ^{Millinocket} land between mine and what this gentleman had just acquired; now and then I add^{ed} a couple of pieces of it to what I took to the dump, though the mess wasn't mine.

The authorities got wind of his presence. They told him he had not had a permit to haul that trailer over the County Rd. That the grandfather clause did not apply to any new ownership of land, that he would have to put a foundation under his trailer, dig or drill a well, and pipe the water into the trailer and maintain a modern bathroom. There was no way he could afford that, for it would also require a septic tank ~~down~~ according to town and state requirements.

I suggested that he move down the road into the unorganizee territory. He said he was considering doing that, but as he had paid for this piece of land he was going to use it for chickens and cows. I happen to love both chickens and cows; I'd make pets of them if any of them lived near me. And unlike some people, I'd loved to hear a rooster crowing in the morning. But there was no real grass on that piece of land, nor would much grow there for it was boreal forest acid soil, full of bunchberry and mosses as well as the violets and cinquefoil. Even if he had but one cow on the place he would have to bring in food for it every day. As to chickens, they would not only have to be fed daily but kept in strong coops, else they'd be fodder to the local hawks, owls and foxes. I called his attention to all this.

I went to Florida that fall, and when I returned in the spring the old gentleman was in the hospital. His yard was worse than ever, as he had brought in a lot more parts and pieces to try, as he said, in his trailer. Two weeks after I got back, he died of cirrhosis of the liver. He wasn't the first alcoholic whom I had known who thought that if they could only get out in the country, by themselves, where friends and relatives would leave them alone, they could drink to their heart's content. All that I ever knew who tried that died from the same cause that he did.

Major had seen the mess over there, so when the old gentleman's daughter, a nicely dressed woman in a much better car than I ever owned, came to tell me of her father's passing, she asked me if I knew anyone who wanted to buy that piece of land. I said I did, and if I could have her phone number I'd call her in two days. I called Major right away. He asked to have it held for him, and by that week-end he paid what the daughter wanted.

That summer I had a new kind of visitor, or visitors. Half way to Milford on the long-way-around better road, there was a small settlement of old to better shacks. I had heard that hippies lived in most of them. By then I had met several couples who had run away from civilization, as it were, lured by the songs and ideas of the flower children period. The few that I knew were all couples, all had children. All wound up disillusioned, and divorced. None of them had ever faced the truth, that food does not grow on trees in the wilderness. That our pioneer ancestors worked very hard to survive in undeveloped country. They never faced a fact of today, - that young people now do not want to work that hard. They want the comforts with a minimum of effort. I often wonder if those who chose to run away to the tropics fared any better than those who chose the Maine wilderness.

There were five hundred hippies living, about that time, at Pssadumkeag Mountain, about twenty-five miles north of my place. They got along by

poaching deer until all the deer in the area disappeared. Some of the men found part time jobs, which paid for milk, bread and cereal for the children. They'd had a skimpy summer; they had found a few edible wild plants, and took advantage of the berry season. With winter up ahead of them they were concerned. After all, five hundred people is quite a crowd to find food for. They chose ten representatives from among them to go down to Indian Island and ask the Penobscot Indians how to live off the land in winter. They had gone to one of my friends, who told me about it. "I told them," he said, "don't you think if we knew how to do that we would?" It reminded me of Joe Polis telling Thoreau of a winter in northern Maine with his father, when he ^{was} a boy, when they nearly starved, unable to even find a rabbit. Joe told Thoreau he would never go up in the woods without bringing enough food with him.

The Passadumkeag hippies got the point. They broke up, supposedly just for the winter. Some hitch-hiked to California, others to Florida. I saw several of them on the streets of Bangor one day with their hands out actually begging. A couple of them had signs hung around their necks begging for help. All were strong, healthy young people. There was no depression at that time; anyone who wanted to work could find something, even helping with the logging. I knew two young fellows who accepted jobs digging ditches on a road crew, laying cable wires. But they quit after the first week. They weren't going to work that hard, but, having dropped out of college, they weren't trained for anything.

One of them found his way to my camp one day. He was tall and skinny and looked as if he had been living in rice. I had just come in from buying my week's groceries, and as I had a bag of unopened peanuts I opened it, handed it to him with a bowl for the shucks. Thinking he would take a share of them I busied myself putting the groceries away, then discovered he had eaten every last peanut. I had debated whether I could afford peanuts that week as it wasn't on my need-list. Now none were left. I held my tongue, gave him a cheese sandwich and a cup of tea and sent him on his way.

A few days later five of them appeared on my doorstep. All were tall, skinny and starved looking, and all in their 20's. They said they lived in one of those shacks on the back road to Milford. After introductions were over, one of them said he understood I received a Social Security check every month. I agreed that was so, else I couldn't stay in my cabin without working and as I was in my seventies I was getting too old to get out there to a job every day. One of them suggested that maybe I would consider sharing my check with them, help them to eat. I said, "Then what do I do when it is all gone? You guys would eat up that check in one week." One of them said, "Then it would be your turn to let some friends who have more than you share with you."

What a way to live! I'd starve before I'd ask friends to share with me. The human mind can distort anything it permits itself to do, then use the distortion for rationalization. Many young people of that period chose to misconstrue Thoreau's philosophy of simple living. But he showed the way to a simple life without scrounging. The core of his philosophy was to be independent, and live within your means, but earn that means.

These fellows didn't want to work at all. But eventually two of them came to see me and offered to do work around my yard, and in the cabin in return for food. That would still eat up my check. Besides, I liked to do my own chores. And, I was not trying to be a capitalist out in the Maine Woods, hiring my labor done. I just wanted to be a shepherd of wildflowers and little birds, while living within my own means.

In fact, I thought I had my life well-planned. I had a paid-for roof over my head, raised most of my own vegetables, collected all of my own firewood, and I used my car only for necessary errands. I was not a waster of natural resources. I lived on this planet without exploiting it. Even what little electricity I used, and the phone were at bare-bottom cost. Taxes were less than a hundred dollars a year.

But I began to think about what would happen to my wildflowers if

old age should suddenly slap me down. One day, ^{when} in that mood, I wrote to Major and Jo and asked if they would like to inherit my place. Having no family other than a sister in Florida and a godchild in Connecticut, both of whom were city-oriented, I thought I should make suitable plans.

As I heard it later, they blinked twice, reread the letter, then accepted. I wanted to be sure. After all, I knew of a lot of property I wouldn't want to inherit. With that settled, first I made out a will, then later I just deeded it over to them. They insisted I live there as long as I wanted to, and they'd take over the taxes.

With that off my mind I did stay awhile, and went down to Florida winters as an interpreter naturalist in the Everglades National Park which gave me a campsite free all winter. Once again, I was living in subtropical nature, with the Florida birds and wildflowers, already familiar companions.

I returned to the Maine cabin every spring, pattered with the wildflowers and raised my own vegetables. It was a routine which fitted my way of life, at least for as long as I could drive to Florida. Then, after that, I could just stay home and write. I assumed I was all set until I had to be taken to a nursing home. Then bang! Overnight the situation changed, and through no fault of mine. Of all things, the Arabs did it! The price of oil trippled, and so did the snowplow work which was dependent upon truck gas. My Social Security check just took care of Miranda's oil barrels, and the snowplow; nothing was left for food and my own car.

As I was now too old to get out to work on those ^e snowy winter Maine roads at 7:00 a.m., I faced reality and signed up for a senior citizen apartment back in my home state of Connecticut as none were in existence at that time in Maine. Some of my wildflowers went with me, into a Town Forest and for similar uses. I did get back to my cabin a couple of times before Major sold it, at my urging, for an even better future with wildflowers.

End