

Reflections at Twilight Time

“And so each day at twilight I am found/ At Heart’s Ford, gazing down the path of light./ Off down that shimmering highway I am bound,/Where silvered silence guilds my lost delight.”

That’s from my poem, “The Sunset Road,” inspired by nightly visits to a fishing pier at Hartford Beach State Park on Bigstone Lake in South Dakota. Those visits began as fishing trips in quest of the lovely walleyes that invaded the shallows most summer evenings. That led to my appreciation of the almost sacred loveliness of sunsets painted as if by God on the silver canvass of the lake stretching off to the west/northwest for many miles.

I often forgot about the fishing and lingered there just for the sunsets alone. Inevitably those sessions led me to ponder things deeper than solving fishing problems, things higher, introducing me to what Plato called the “higher pleasures of the soul.” And I am still learning from the living scriptures of the Bible, that there are pleasures even beyond those of the soul, which belong to a whole other kingdom, the realm of the Spirit, whose king is our lord and savior, Jesus Christ.

Just a few years ago, we sold our little place on the lake, but I brought with me the old habit of seeking out sunsets over marshes, rivers, lakes and ponds closer to our home in Wahpeton, North Dakota. Of late, I often park my car along a gravel road that borders a lovely marsh just a few miles away, and parking there has given me the chance to let the lovely late-summer sunsets speak to me secrets and memories I otherwise would have missed.

This week, these verses were brought again into my mind, “And now the purple dust of twilight time/ Steals across the meadows of my heart/ High up in the sky, the little stars climb/ Always reminding me that we’re apart.” Those lines

from “Stardust” simply defy forgetting. So also do these from Walter de la Mare’s haunting poem, “Song of Enchantment,” “Twilight came; silence came,/ The planet of evening’s silver flame.”

And, “Deepening shadows gather splendor/ As day is done/ Fingers of night will soon surrender/ The setting sun/ I count the moments darling till I’m here with you,/ Together, at last at twilight time.” That’s by Buck Ram who wrote it for “The Platters,” still my favorite 1950’s combo.

Also I’ve noticed that the citizens of the Marsh obey predictable evening routines, and the most noticeable is the last flight. Just after the sun sinks below the horizon, the wood ducks and mallards make their circle of the area before they seek out their favorite coves for the night. Then the great blue herons make their last passage, usually ending on a spit of shoreline where they can stab a few last frogs or minnows before they melt into the rushes for the night. Then in, and in the deepening twilight, morning doves alight on their favorite bare branches and nighthawks, cousins of the whippoorwills, put on their dazzling display as they dart, dip, dive and climb after soaring hatches of fish flies rising from the marsh.

Sadly, the bewitching, silvery song of the whippoorwills is rarely available for us here, but Fats Domino’s great rendition of “My Blue Heaven” still gets replayed on the turn table of my mind, “When whippoorwills call/ And evening is nigh/ I hasten to my blue heaven/...You’ll see a smiling face, a fireplace, a cozy room/ A little nest that’s nestled/ where the roses bloom/ Just Molly and me/ And baby makes three/ We’re happy in my blue heaven.” That may not even come close to the perfection of our future heavenly mansion, but down here on this sin-sick, stressed-out world, it serves as a precious intimation of our dreamed-of Paradise to come.

So while the words of Tennyson's immortal *shipping out* poem, "Crossing the Bar," nudge my memory, let's give it one more listen: "Twilight, and evening star/ And one clear call for me/ And may there be no moaning of the bar/ When I put out to sea/...For though from out this borne of time and place/ The flood may bear me far/ I hope to see my Pilot face to face/ When I have crossed the bar."

Gene Pinkney/ for 23-09-04-