

Where the Wild Thyme Blows

My new boss, managing editor Frank Stanko is a man of many surprises; the latest being that he wanted me to give my column a title heading rather than my just naming each article separately. In the ten seconds I needed to come up with something, it dawned on me to use the title I gave my column back in the 70's. So from now on you'll be reading me from "Where the Wild Thyme Blows."

The scholars out there will know that that title is not original, and that it comes from The Bard's "A Midsummer Night's Dream," and a speech the king of the fairies, Oberon, makes about his queen, Titania. I've always considered that speech magical, because it awakens my love for secret, hidden, lovely places: Here it is:

"I know a bank where the wild thyme blows,/ Where ox slip and the nodding violet grows,/ All over canopied with luscious woodbine/ With sweet musk roses and with eglantine./ There sleeps Titania sometime of the night/ Lulled in those flowers with dances and delight/ And there the snake throws his enameled skin,/ Weed wide enough to wrap a fairy in."

So the name I'm giving this Wild Thyme article is "Secret Places." And that title comes from Psalm 91:1 kjv. "He that dwelleth in the secret place of the Most High shall abide under the shadow of The Almighty." Some later translations replace shadow with shelter, but I much prefer shadow. Other translations even do away with "secret place." I find that almost unthinkable.

Secret hideaways have always appealed to me, just as they did to Joseph Wood Krutch, musing on his Lake Superior *Listening Point*, or Henry David Thoreau, drinking in the silence of Walden Pond. No naturalist ever wants the

sacred silence of his “secret place,” broken with raucous, cackling laughter. That secret place is no “Hernando’s Hideaway.”

When you “steal away” to your “secret place,” you will allow its perfect silence, broken only by “thrush music,” or perhaps the haunting, cry of a loon, or if you’re listening in England, one of Keats’ nightingale’s pouring forth its soul in plaintive ecstasy.”

Walter Delamare’s “A Song of Enchantment” also celebrates such a “secret place” where song and prayer or poem seem to become one: “A song of enchantment I sang me there/ In a green, green wood/ By waters fair// Just as the words came up to me/ I turned them under the wild wood tree.” Yet all these haunting places are but echoes or inklings of “The secret place of the most high” David sang of in Psalm 91: 1. I think they flow from The Holy Ghost, as He inspires poets, mystics, mourners, and nuns at vespers to muse on things that are “high and solitary and most stern.”

Our summer place on Bigstone Lake often became such a place for us, where on magical midsummer nights we could sit in silence, hearing only the tree frogs’ serenade, with whippoorwills carrying the melody, fireflies supplying the visual ambiance, and snap dragons, clover, alfalfa, and wild thyme breathing out their fragrances to preserve the moment for future memories.

But the “wild thyme” I wrote of in the 70’s was also very much open to all the poetic possibilities of “wild” and “thyme.” That was a time when I was as open to the “wild” of Hank Williams’ “*wild* side of life,” as I was to the *wild* ducks and pheasants Warren and I hunted in the fall and the black bass we chased in tournaments all summer long. We shared in wanting to “drink life to the lees” as if it were one joyous and continual happy hour.

In contrast, many years later I came upon the lovely book “Wild at Heart, which beautifully linked that longing for wild things with inbreathings from the Holy Spirit, reminding us of the marvelous immensity of God’s vision for his creation, including us.

But things are different now. My hearing is too damaged to hear the singing birds or carry a tune, my senses of smell and taste are all but gone so that I can barely tell the good wine from the bad. And the acute, star-splitting vision I had for years in my remaining good eye is often blurred now by floaters.

You’d think I’d be depressed, but I’m not. All of my failing physical senses have been superseded by visits from my “friend that sticks closer than a brother,” my dear, humble, but all powerful Holy Spirit, whose indwelling presence helps me totally forget any diminution of my bodily senses.

Now now at 86, I sometimes find it hard to hear the whisper of the Spirit “in the roaring traffic’s boom,” invading “the silence of my lonely room.” Now I pray for “sessions of sweet silent thought,” moments of “perfect peace,” and do my best to scrape off the *gunga* and tune out the *din*, by singing, “Come Holy Spirit, I need thee/ Come sweet Spirit I pray;/ Come in your grace and your power/ Come in your own special way.”

“Now, this old dog barks backward/ Without getting up/” just as Robert Frost wrote of his ‘Hound of Heaven.’ But mine’s not sleeping; he’s just got his ears tuned to words and music too high for some humans to hear.

Gene Pinkney for the Daily News 24-03-03-