

NormalcyMag

Exploring American Culture



The Wicked Winters of the Midwest

*The Charmed and Enduring Epics of
Snow, Cold and Life in the Heart of America*

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Editor's Standard

Welcome back to our magazine! In this issue, we bring you our evolving design and format, but with the content and style you have come to expect as previous readers. For new readers, we can only say, "Take out of this magazine what you can use, and leave the rest behind." As we try some new ideas and ways of presenting our views and our look, we promise to continually refine all of it. One thing remains firm. We hold that society and its large and/or corrupt institutions usually define normal and not-normal in ways to profit by them. Our intent, as NormalcyMag, remains committed to the big middle area where we believe most people want to find themselves: Not on the hard and bitter extremes, but some where in-between. We call that nebulous area of average, everyday living by the name of "normalcy." In this issue, we have the

usual departments and the authors you have come to know: "The Ghost," J.D. Schloss, Pi Kielty (posthumously from the grave) and myself, along with a reprised cover art contributor, our good friend, Dan Osborne. Always open to submissions, please feel free to check out the details on our website, www.normalcymag.com. We welcome new contributors, and we look forward to hearing from you with your ideas, pics, designs, etc. We have done something new: We put a suggested retail price or donation on our cover. While the magazine remains free to read on-line (on our site), our business advisers suggested we put a value on print issues. This one? \$1.

As always, please read with open mind! Enjoy.

Tim Krenz
Editor

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Reflecting On Resolutions

By "The Ghost"

"You say you want a resolution, well you know, we all want to change the world."


OK, clearly these are not the famous words of the famous musical group The Beatles but they are the infamous words of many people come the turn of the calendar new year. After a year gone by of letting ourselves go physically, being in and out of unhealthy relationships, or just not being where we want to be in life, many of us choose January 1st as the first day of the rest of our lives. We do this as a way to boost our self-esteem. We want to feel better about ourselves so we place these lofty goals and swear that this is the year that we get our lives together, whether it be by losing weight, getting our finances in order, or meeting Mr. or Ms. Right.

Then, inevitably, by January 4th it is too cold outside to go to the gym, we have found that last tray of cookies, the after-Christmas sale happens, and the person from our past calls up looking for that "one last chance."

The self-esteem we were hoping to grow has once again been shattered. Instead of starting over we indulge in the unhealthy behavior all the more until next year when we do it all over again. This cyclical turn of events happens year after year with no end in sight. Will this be the year the cycle breaks? That, my friends, is up to you!

What if this year instead of the lofty (unrealistic) goals, we all just set one little goal for just one day? What if

each day we set a new little goal for the next day? As we achieve each little goal we will become motivated to go after each new goal in turn raising our self-esteem. We can then choose to set increasingly higher goals as we go along. Should we fail for a day, who cares, tomorrow will be a new day with a new goal and we can go back and attempt the other goal at a later date.

This new year I encourage you to set a resolution to give yourself a break. Understand that you are human and allow your self-esteem to grow as you achieve your daily goals. For "If you want a real solution" as the Beatles said, we all gotta change our heads. 

"The Ghost, a St. Croix Valley native, lives and works, anonymously, in the Twin Cities, MN."



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Sub Terra Vita Chronicle #50

Battles of “Snow-magedon”

By Tim Krenz

Remembering winter from my youth in the St. Croix Valley, I recall the snow most of all, and although we got conflicting weather patterns and snow from different compass points in western Wisconsin, it always came down from the sky. Sometimes it even pistol whipped us sideways, whenever a good blizzard and the winds hit us just at the wrong time. It always seemed to come down in instant drifts in the 1970s and 1980s, as heavy snow and wet in swirls, or so my imaginative memory thinks today. A village buried in snow meant pleasing words to eager and attentive ears listening to the radio during breakfast on school mornings. “Osceola Public Schools—CLOSED.”

A snow day! A fun day it always became on those not infrequent days in January, February, March which followed the snow storms of the century. For a snow day usually involved some epic, special recreation.

On a normal winter's day, the kids on the upper part of the village, south of the Soo Line tracks, did the normal things—on weekends and AFTER school. Bundled and stuffed in multi-colored snow gear and black and blue snowmobile wear, we sledged down hills in the neighborhood, in front of my house or out back in the Industrial Park. When not dodging huge oaks and elms and pines in the runs, we jumped creek beds on toboggans, until someone like a cousin broke her leg landing on the ice of the stream. Even though that would end the fun, we went back and did it again anyway the next day.

Most of the normal freezing days, we built snow forts out of the crusty, hard old snow. Those never stood up well

but served their purpose. Digging dangerous snow tunnels in the plowed-up banks of snow? Yep, we did that, too. Like all kids everywhere, we did kid stuff in the snow. Under the water tower, in the park on top of the railroad embankment, we played hockey at the small ice skating rink, next to the tennis and basketball courts all buried in snow. Some of us had hockey skates, some figure skates, and some just shuffled on the ice in black rubber boots or moon boots, with the felt or cotton ridiculously lined with bread bags to keep the feet dry. Few of our neighborhood gang knew about hockey, but it served us well to try. We learned the manly art of cross checking more than we learned to handle a deft stick to put a puck on goal. Still, we played hockey, though badly.

All of these things we did, normally. But a snow day from school? That demanded something different. A snow day meant a different aspect in the snow, a change in the way we played, and a true duty to other suckers in other districts who had to go to school that day. We owed it to all boys and girls everywhere to have the ultimate battle Royal of the winter months, in our neighborhood, and in the name of all others, everywhere. We owned that duty.

The days school stayed closed for snow invariably meant we had a deluge of the heavy wet kind of “sky snot,” the type of snow with which we could do something useful. This particular type of snow came with a warmer temperature, still tipping around freezing, but not the deep Arctic freeze that arrived following the light, fluffy sorts of “sky dandruff” snow. If warm, the snow stayed wet, causing especial strain when we shoveled out the

house entries and the driveways and mailboxes, those places where the snowplows rumbled up huge banks of dirty, road crud snow. Once we finished our grueling chores of shoveling snow, the playing on the snow day began by rallying at the funnest places for a heavy duty snow day of fun.

One particular day when school closed after a warm and deep snow storm, the south hill gang of the village all gathered at a usual play site. Located at the southwest corner of the railroad tracks where it intersected “old M” road, it did not have any of the usual playground amenities. It had no swings, no slide, no merry-go-rounds. What did it have to attract us so near a railroad intersection? Well, it had a narrow, tree-free, dug out side of the ridge line that formed the upper area of Osceola. Since the earth of that exposed embankment, without snow cover, looked and felt a grainy, very reddish and heavy muddy dirt, we knew it by its colloquial name, “the Clay Pit.” And when the heavy snow came, and it gathered against, on top, and below the sheer and steep face of it, the Clay Pit served as the ultimate in death sliding and cliff jumping down into snow piles.

The face of the pit did not drop too treacherously far, but it did provide its own unique fun, terror and challenge for all kids. We would bring sleds to jump and tumble, helplessly, down the bank. After a couple of superman flops down, the red muddy streak marks from the mix of earth and wet, melting snow left our clothes and faces a series of smears in sepia brown. Eventually, on that one particular snow day, like others, we all geared and itched for “the Battle.”

It never happened by any deliberate game play, or the choosing of sides, or by capturing any nebulous flags, nor according to Marquise of Queensberry rules, either. The battle just began with whoever found themselves on the top versus those under the handicap of standing at the bottom. It seems to me, that day like many others, the

battle for the Clay Pit supremacy just started when someone threw the first snowball.

The battle involved snowballs, but it also took form as an inelegant ballet of king of the hill, on a real tall hill with a straight up climb. The hard and packed snowballs we prepared, sometimes secretly minutes ahead, hit with the impact of ice balls, but ones with hard mud and gravel mixed in them. Some fired less effectively up at the defenders; yet, most of the ice balls plunged with full force downhill. If kids got to the top, they of course tried to toss the defenders down, onto the slithery slope and into mud below. Most of the time, the topside hoplites paired in teams to toss the Light Brigade chargers over the side and back from whence they came—dropped to the muddy snow drifts. As the ice cannon balls flew, they caused some pain, though less on the breastplates of snow suit armor. If hit in the face, the projectiles left red and cold marks, perhaps a cut on the cheek even. Some cried, but all tried to share the laugh.

That day, like always, at some point those below the hill gave up their futile charge. If anyone made it to the top to join those happy fewer who outnumbered the attackers at the start, they all claimed the victory of good, or bad (?), in the winter struggle of Snowmagedon, “The Battle for the Clay Pit Heights!”

And like other kids everywhere, following the snowball fight, we trudged in our small gangs to someone's house for stories and soup and hot chocolate. Everyone victors, we all shared the honors.



Story

Thawing

By J.D. Schloss

I. Weston, Meet Fate

Beneath The Surface was the only rag to give space to ideas about the Frost. The articles were mostly conspiracy theory, supposition, innuendo. . . not many facts were available. Fuzzy Scales, editor of *BTS* (and notorious Zip fiend), had been the first to write about the string of men seemingly vanishing from the face of the earth. Scales attributed the disappearances over the past few years to the presence and work of an ominous, government agency he called “The Winter Squad.” According to Scales, those taken were shipped off to some barren, arctic tundra—a wintry hell on earth—to pay for their sins in frozen isolation.

“I’m scared,” Weston said.

“We have nothing to worry about, enjoy your drink,” Bix replied, as he masterfully topped off each of their flutes with more of the bubbly. “They haven’t taken anyone from north of 44th Street yet. It’s just the rabble they go after.”

“Bix, I don’t think they’re stopping at 44th, and I don’t think it’s dropped below 77 degrees here in the last century.”

“Look, man, The Frost is a thin-the-masses slash morality play, that, to be sure, is a bit distasteful, but beneath you and I.”

“Jesus, Bix. What in the hell is wrong with you?”

“Calm down, Wes. We’re City Men. Our families built this town. The Winter Squad won’t be coming after us.”

“Listen to yourself, man. You’re endorsing a pogrom. And if it’s a morality thing...you’d be the first degenerate they’d swoop up.”

“Speaking of the dissolute, did you read what that prick Scales wrote about me last week?”

Weston had seen the article but wanted to hear Bix say it aloud. “I’ve stopped reading him. What’d he say?”

“There was another picture of me on the back page and he captioned it ‘Born on Third Base... Thinks He Hit a Triple’. IN BOLD 17 POINT FONT, no less! You know, it’s only the jealous and petty who throw around words like ‘entitlement.’ What is it about being born filthy rich and wanting for nothing that just puts me in the crosshairs of the less fortunate? Where’s the compassion?”

To be sure, life at the Lofts, in the time before, had been carefree and comfortable. Billed as “Apartments of Modern Distinction,” the spaces were magnificent. Bix called their penthouse suite, “the peerless intersection of fashion and function.” Bix said a lot of things.

“Here, Weston, have a little Zip. It’ll pick you up. I’ll call Isobel over and she’ll shake you right out of your funk.”

Weston allowed Bix to prepare him a shot and instantly felt the fear melt away.

“Isobel, you look lovely,” Bix said, greeting her with a kiss on the forehead.

“Thank you dear. Have you seen the latest from Scales?” Isobel asked.

“About me being a spoiled party boy?”

“No, no, no. Though, that was a great picture of you, my little ballplayer.” Isobel laughed and took a cigarette from the silver box on the table. Weston was there immediately to light it for her. “He’s got an interview with a guy who claims he saw the Winter Squad take some junkie. One minute the guy’s got a needle in his arm, nodding out on the sidewalk, and the next, four goons in tactical cammo shoot him with some kind of net gun thingy and drag him into this big RV.”

“Oh my, metropolitan bagging and tagging! I love it!” Bix shouted. “I wonder if they field dressed him...whatever that means!”

“I’ve had it with you, man,” Weston got up from the chaise and stumbled toward the door.

“Come back, Wes. I’m only playing. You’ve had too much to drink. Don’t leave. Isobel, talk some sense into him, will you?”

“Let’s let him go. He’s been such a drag lately. Good riddance to bad rubbish. More bubbles please,” Isobel cooed, waving her glass at Bix.

Weston’s head was spinning as he aimlessly made his way down St. Charles. That last hit of Zip hadn’t been enough to match the booze he’d thrown down over the course of the evening. He decided he’d need to find a little more to help gather his senses. Bix had always talked about a bodega on 50th that didn’t step too hard on the stuff, so Weston made his way south through the urban canyon.

Weston knew he was in trouble before the man even pulled the gun. “Well, well, well...what do we have here? A plump little cake-eater! Up against the wall,” the big man demanded. Weston couldn’t make out the man’s features. He was wearing all black, the over-sized hood of his sweatshirt shrouding his face. “You got some cojones...coming down here to score with that Winter Squad running around. Too bad I got you first.”

“I don’t really care anymore,” Weston replied with a resignation and maybe a courage he didn’t know was in him. “My life has been lived on a pillow. A soft, fluffy pillow and I’m tired of it. Do with me what you will.”

“Boy, I feel ya,” his assailant remarked. His laugh revealing a mouth filled with jagged, rotted teeth that looked like raisins. “The plight of the hapless cake-eater. Too much damn money and no damn sense. Sounds like I’m doing you a favor relieving you of this fancy pocket watch and this, this exotic leather wallet brimming with the cash and cards

that's got you doing life in your own velvet-walled prison...Oh, shit! Here they come..."

Weston was hearing what the man was saying and surprised at how calm—even at gunpoint—he felt. His mind wasn't focused on what his assailant was saying, or that he might get shot. Weston saw a bright light. He was imagining The Frost and feeling waves of peace and then he was falling. Not a care in the world.

II. Fate, Meet Weston

"So, Weston, if you see a cub, without mama, put that head of yours on a swivel and start hightailing it out of there," the weathered cowboy tells me. It had been just two days since I'd been relocated by the Winter Squad. I was a fish out of water. A bachelor without a cotillion. They'd grabbed me, been nothing but kind to me, then dropped me off at this strange shack up the canyon from a town called High Desert. The rancher continued, "Now, if you just see the big bear, you're not in any danger. We've got a trailer up at 10,000 feet," he pointed behind us and I turned to look up at the rise of pines slanting way up into the heavens. The canyon was simply breathtaking. I was terrified, but taking great pleasure and peace from the mountain air and being in and above the clouds. The man continued, "My wife likes taking pictures and she sees big bear monkeying around the shed. She gets out the shotgun, but doesn't put any buckshot in the bear's ass to let her know he's bear non grata. Wife goes down into town, comes back, and the trailer is destroyed. That big son of a bitch punched out all the windows, busted down the door, shit all over the place, tore up the furniture, and must've drunk six quarts of motor oil. Everything was ripped to shreds. Wife said it looked like one of those snowglobes—you know, from all the down feathers flying around from the comforters and pillows the bastard shredded. I been telling her she should've put some buckshot in that bear's ass and maybe he would've stayed away. She just stares icy daggers at me. That Airstream is her meditation spot. I'd rather tangle with a mountain lion than my wife."

"Mountain lions," I gasped. "Are they man eaters?" My head was spinning from all the information the kind man was giving. Was I to be scared of bears? Run from them? Stay in my cabin? What kind of beast bites into cans of motor oil? I didn't know the difference between a mountain lion, cougar, or jaguar but I was convinced they were killers. The few walks I'd taken in nature during the time before had been awful. I'd been convinced that out of nowhere, some giant cat would leap out of the forest and sink its teeth into my jugular. I had terrible images of my throat being ripped out.

"No, son. They usually will just go after babies or boutique dogs. The last tenant and his wife said they saw two of 'em take down a buck."

"Well, I weigh about as much as 70 boutique dogs. Sounds like I'd make a pretty good meal for a catamount."

The man gave a loud, long reassuring laugh and said, “Well, at least your sense of humor’s intact. That’ll serve you out here. You know how to handle a firearm?”

“No, sir.” I’d been staring at the butt of the pistol he had holstered on his belt. “I’ve never shot one before. Do I need one?” It was an odd feeling to be around this man, the essence of man, in my opinion. Strong, lean, a builder, wise, in touch with the land...everything I wasn’t. I now know that odd feeling to be the absence of shame.

“Well, if you don’t know how to shoot one, you’d best take some lessons. I’d suggest getting bear spray and maybe an air horn if you plan on doing any hiking up here. And don’t leave any food out, cover the trashcan, and if you decide to grill, just know you might have some visitor. Now let’s go over the rest of the place here. I got to get on back to my wife and they asked me to show you the ropes. We’ve covered animal attacks and self defense techniques. You ever swing an axe?”

Now I was really feeling uncomfortable. “What would I need with an ax? I can’t imagine trying to fight off a wild animal with one.”

He smiled kindly at me and said, “No, son. The axe is for chopping wood. The only heat up here is from your woodstove.”

“You can put woodstove operation in the same category as firing guns and swinging axe. The list of what I don’t know is loooooonnnnggg. Can you show me how?”

“I like that, son. Asking for help. That’s a good sign of a strong, courageous man.”

I was a bit stunned to hear that. Not once had he used words or body language to suggest I was some kind of worthless city slicker tourist. In fact, it was the opposite. Like he knew how poorly equipped I was to deal with my new reality and pulled up alongside me to give me strength.

He gave me a quick wood chopping tutorial and let me try a few swings. We went into the shack and he showed me how to feed the fire he had going in the woodstove. “There’s \$500 in credit with Floyd down at the general store. It’s what we give everyone who comes out here. After that, it’s up to you. Get a job in town, whatever it is you need to do. I have faith in you, son.” And with that, he was gone.

As I watched his pickup disappear down the snow covered trail, fear and culture shock set in. I was alone, with very few of the skills required to survive outside of a luxury spa and resort. Again though, a calm I didn’t know possible, came over me and seemed to guide me to action. It was a gorgeous winter morning. A bright, happy sunshine had burned off the clouds. The jacket and boots they’d replaced my tux with were warm and sturdy. I was used to walking the city streets in the time before, so the three-mile hike into town wasn’t too daunting. I was a bit jumpy though about the possibility of a forest’s worth of wild animals deciding I didn’t need a new start, but made it to the general store

unscathed.


Two hours later, I was fully outfitted. Small machete tied to my thigh, 15 inch Bowie knife on one hip; Leatherman in my front pocket; and a backpack filled with rope, 40 foot range bear spray; trail mix; jerky; hardtack... (just kidding about the hardtack); and some other victuals to keep myself fed; fat wood to help start fires and a few candles. I had no idea what in the hell I was going to do with most of this stuff, but felt like these were the necessary supplies for a budding mountain man. I spied a beautiful cowboy hat/sombrero that I decided would be the perfect capping of the ensemble. Purchases made, Floyd wished me well and I made my way to the door and jumped in terror at the clanging of chimes and a glass picture frame falling to the floor and breaking.

“Don’t worry about the mess, Podnah,” Floyd drawled. “Them hats take some getting use’ta. You be well and come see me anytime.”

I made it back to the shack without incident and was proud of myself for ducking as I crossed the threshold to my new home. I was armed for bear and starting to feel pretty confident that I might be able to make a go of it when’ll of the sudden a mouse scurried across the floor of the shack. I leaped in the air, shrieking and felt a stab of pain in my chest. The heavy pack contributed to a bad landing and there I was, in a heap, on the floor. The weapons and tools in my pockets, and on my body, jabbing what felt like my entire body. Armed for bear yet mowed down by a mouse, I couldn’t do anything but laugh.

You’ve probably guessed by now that this isn’t a pastoral. Sure, it’s an idyllic and glorious landscape, but I am not cut out for it. A month of struggles in the canyon with ash storms from my misadventures with the woodstove; spraining my ankle in snowshoes, and shivering away each night showed me that you can take this city boy out of the city blah blah blah. I didn’t give up though. These tribulations and being confronted with my limited skill were a great gift.

I’ve been living in the town of High Desert now for almost three months. Winter is almost over and I’ve never been warmer. I’m not much of a fan of the whole, “everything happens in god’s world for a reason” reasoning. I feel like it’s a lazy, often cruel thing to say to someone. A weak attempt to explain away some awfulness. It’s also, at times, said to help heal, well intended, but misguided and flat falling. I just don’t think I have the right to tell someone else that things are happening *to* them for a reason. I’ve learned though that I get to look at my own life this way and, over time, recognizing things happening for a reason-both to and for me-makes a whole lot of sense.

I have no idea if my being taken by the Winter Squad was a mistake-that maybe it was my assailant they were after. Hell, I have no idea why I’m even calling them the Winter Squad. I guess it’s just something to call them. I am grateful for them though. Without them I would have never known I was frozen. 

J.D. Schloss, one-time resident of the St. Croix Valley, lives, works, and writes in New Mexico, USA.

The Low Adventures

Trekking Superior Hiking Trail

Part 5: A Proto-Typical Family Vacation

By Tim Krenz

When camping with one person or a small group over many trips, divisions of labor and routine establish themselves. Chores get divided and done pretty much by mutual consent of everyone involved. It works pretty good that way. Add new elements and other people and new adventures happen, and in new dynamics of having fun. With our trip to the Superior Hiking Trail in June 2003, I settled in as one member of the “Craig Mueller family,” which continues to the day of writing this memoir, 15 years later. And many good, and different, adventures we have all had.

In our camping trips over the years, even from before Craig's two-year stint in the Peace Corps, we had done camping in the St. Croix River backwaters, and now had done three two-person expeditions to the trail in northern Minnesota along Lake Superior. I had only once before camped with Craig and his wife as part of a group. Craig and Jen met in the Peace Corps, both serving in the east African nation of Kenya. Although I did not attend the wedding in 1999 when they arrived home in the States that fall, I nonetheless had met Jen as a pen-pal almost as soon they both left our country in 1997, so we all did get along rather well.

Their daughter, Anya, coming up on three years in the summer of 2003, made up the rest of their family, until they added Syd the dog two years later. We never did know quite where I fit into the super-nuclear family. Like on my visits to their different homes, I just sort of show up, and they never have had the heart to get rid of me since. On that summer of 2003 trip to the Superior Hiking Trail, the four of us spent three nights in a privately-owned campground near Two Harbors, MN. The most

memorable part came when Anya almost got carried away by a flock of white gulls.

After Jen and I toured Glenshein Mansion in Duluth on the way up, while Craig and Anya occupied themselves outside, our troupe checked into Big Blaze Campground around 3 PM on the last Thursday of June. The first night we did not do much, except eat very, very well. Our supper, well balanced, consisted of salad, pork chops, potatoes, peaches, and the ever-present coffee around the campfire until rain drove the Mueller family to their safari tent and me to my two-man Eureka. For the trip I had brought along the texts of the Lincoln-Douglas debates, and I read for a couple of hours that night, dozing for a snoring nine hour nap. When Craig woke me at 8 o'clock, he had made a hearty breakfast of sausage, eggs, and of course, coffee. I would carry extra heavy weight on the morning's short hike of the trail, as indeed we always did. At least we did not eat McDonald's, which never. . . well. . .

All four of us drove up to near Silver Bay, MN, where we hiked in sunshine along a section of the main trail starting around 10:30 AM. Craig carried Anya most of that morning in a child carrier backpack, a far lighter load, perhaps, than he would have carried had we had full packs for camping on the trail. The hike that day followed over hilly ground but the trail itself kept mostly to the ridge lines. It looked rather unremarkable except to note the heavily used ATV trails the Superior hiking path followed or crossed.

We saw some industrial development, too, like pipe line pumping station buildings and a huge, possibly man-

made lake for iron mining debris, surrounded by scree of huge, sharp rocks coming down the hillsides of the reservoir's valley. We saw power lines, too. On the other hand, the most striking and serene aspect of that day hike we saw at the bottom from one cliff side look out: A beaver lodge in the middle of the the clearest pond water, all surrounded by evergreen trees, with all the hills and green reflected off the mirror-calm surface of the small pond. We could even see the bottom of that very clean body of water. At least the beaver had it right.

After a picnic by the car in Bayside Park, we drove back to the campground. That night, using some precious dried oak Craig had brought from home, we had a good and willing fire. We ate another well-balanced meal, this one featuring not only salad, canned corn and buttered herd rice, but a big slab of buttered grilled salmon Craig cooked in foil on the fire. After I almost blew myself up lighting my old red Coleman lantern, I read for a couple of hours outside my tent after the Muellers withdrew for the night. We may have had a good afternoon of clear,

sunny weather, but the night got a little damp and chilly, and the air began to feel like a lot of rain the next day, a Saturday.

I woke first the next morning, around 6 AM, made coffee and spent the morning reading and reflecting thoughts perhaps now forgot. The drunk kids who camped right next to our not-very-private site had at some point all passed out from the alcohol and other things. Judge not, lest I get judged. I counted my fortune in my head like gold that I no longer suffered myself any things like that former part of my life. I, indeed, enjoyed the serene quiet morning, hearing in my thoughts how Lincoln and Douglas would have sounded, debating in 1858. I heard a storming rush of Lake Superior water lashing loudly against the shore less than 60 yards from our campsite. Then, I wondered why the guy who parked across the campsite road on the lake side of the campground actually needed to carry camping gear in a small U-Haul trailer? That seemed overdone, for reasons I could not know, except that he really wanted all the comforts of



home at the campsite.

The campground, full by Friday night, had many motor homes and camping trailers, R.V.s in the lexicon. The different couples and families really went all out in their camp set ups. The people directly opposite of us actually spent two hours Friday night getting their little love shack all perfect, including spending too much time, in my opinion, hanging little electric Chinese lanterns dangling from the awning of their pop-up camp trailer. I suppose I developed a different habit of camping in my life. I spent my youth camping in Boy Scouts or with my family's motor home, but even then I got shoved out of the campers and in to the Camel pup tent I got at age 9. And still, my backpack could weigh a ton, too, on backpack camping trips. But as Craig would always say, "you can take it on the trip, Tim, IF you carry it yourself." Yet, for the car camping trip to this base camp at Big Blaze, we brought some heavy and cumbersome crap, too—lawn chairs, coolers, group cook kit, etc. We judge not, lest we get judged, right? But at the least, we did not need a whole damn U-Haul trailer.

When the others woke that morning, emerging from Craig's large, blue dome tent near 7 o'clock, we ate dainty and yummy French toast of Craig's creation and the clumpy scrambled eggs I whipped and cooked from dry-powder and water. We could have skipped the eggs. By 9:20 AM, Jen and Anya dropped Craig and I off at Wolf's Rock for the Crow Creek section of the trail. While the girls drove to Duluth to shop, Craig and I descended to a bridge, where the hill slope we walked down had a large stretch of heavy, icky poison ivy on each side. Well marked by signs, Craig believed this particular part had the only known poison ivy "orchard" along the entire trail, or so the guide book might have said so.

Once across the creek, we walked up yet another tall hill, 1000 feet above sea level. We passed two guys coming

down some of the steps which formed along parts of the hillside, and they carried a lot of gear in huge, heavy looking packs. They had not a speck of filth on them and spotless gear and bags. Craig commented later that we probably carried as much heavy crap on some of our trips, and that he and I probably would look as ridiculously burdened as those two men. Judge not, lest we get judged, right? From then, I always tried to carry a lighter backpack in future camping trips, mostly unsuccessfully. With only day packs that day, at least we did not have to carry all the normal gear with us and we traveled rather lighter up that hill. Still, the climb exhausted me, if not Craig, too.

As always the rule when day hiking or backpacking, when we saw a bench, we sat on it. And we saw a bench at the top of that hill. And we sat on it. Shaded by pines, looking out over a drop from the cliff where we sat, the sky looked more like rain than it had earlier in the morning. Sitting there, on cue, the drizzle, and heavier drizzle started to fall and mist.

Once we put on our rain coats, we walked the topline of that cliff and the connecting ridge line, passing an open field on that hill. Trees of the forest enclosed that field, with the grass of the open space all tall, thin, and densely growing with blades of greenish yellow. After a mile, we snaked the other side of the hill in a slow descent, in the rain that began to really fall. At least it did not have a whipping wind.

Over the Encampment River, we traversed a high, sturdily built and well-engineered bridge, which impressed Craig, a working civil engineer himself. It even had heavy metal cables holding it lashed to trees on either shore's hillsides, to prevent the structure from washing away in rains or spring melt, as Craig explained to me.

At the top of yet another hill, we arrived at yet another

thrilling overlook. Approaching the cliff side from behind, we startled another memorable stranger on our many low-scaled adventures to the Superior Hiking Trail. Stony, as we nicknamed him later, sat on a log, wringing the water out of his muddy, wet socks. We talked to this recent college kid, who wore a “Gilligan hat” in the heavy rain, and he said he just moved back to Minnesota from Washington State, where he had gone to school and done much camping in the mountains. Little did either I, or more importantly, Craig, realize then how that state and those mountains would figure into our own lives and more low adventures a decade later.

After talking with Stony quite some time, the rest of the walk south toward Two Harbors passed rather quickly. Thank goodness for light day hiking pack bags. We came to a couple of roads, where I whined in disappointment that we still had more walking to do to reach my car which we shuttled with Jen in the morning. Craig also found a smudged dog's print in the fresh mud on the way to my car. “It looks like a wolf's,” he said, perhaps jesting me. He startled to howl and made fun of my sudden unease and slight discomfort while we stood over a huge ass footprint of a really BIG dog.

Back at the campground, with Jen and Anya still away for the afternoon, I took a twenty-five minute shower in the campground bathhouse. It soothed and warmed my bones, freshened my attitude, and cleansed me of the mud and muck. I even shaved my beard stubble under the hot water streams using a hand held mirror. I really did not feel like getting out and into the cold air of a concrete building on a cold, rainy Lake Superior June day. In camp, I read in the tent or outside when the rain subsided. We did get a fire going, using the last of the precious dry oak, those extra scrappings of shelves Craig had built in the Mueller condo in West St. Paul, MN. Over the cracking and snapping fire, we made brats and hot dogs, and baked beans. We decided to not hike the next morning, a Sunday, and would pack instead and go our



Some of the gulls after 2-year old Anya did her best Tippi Hedren impersonation. Notice the trailer between the lake and the road, with its lanterns on the awning. (Photo by Tim Krenz).

different homes Sunday.

Around supper time, in the early evening when the gray and black clouds took away the sunlight earlier, Anya started feeding birds with bread crumbs. She stood in the middle of the dirt between the rows of campsites, throwing bread and attracting white-grayish gulls who fed along the shoreline. She threw more bread, attracted more gulls, and danced around. Then, suddenly, she looked like a Tippi Hedren munchkin, in Alfred Hitchcock's movie, “The Birds,” getting swarmed around and dived bombed by a hundred of the very aggressive gulls. Craig, Jen and I would have laughed, but we all seemed too worried. When Craig told his daughter to stop throwing bread, she got bored and the birds tapered off in numbers, just as magically as they appeared—from nowhere.

That Saturday night, I slept warm, and despite the drunken party and the music racket coming from the

campsite next door, I nonetheless slept well and thankful.
Judge not, lest I get judged, right?

The trip home in my own car by myself passed uneventfully, with one exception. My old greenish-blue Dodge Shadow, which I had named “Grushenka,” after a Dostoyeski character, would only go uphill about 25 miles an hour. Heading up the steep incline of I-35 heading south from Duluth, I had to watch the Muellers pass me, and I had to watch all the other frustrated drivers line up behind me to pass, too. I could only laugh. That seemed the hardest hill to surmount that weekend. But, I did have a fun weekend. As the years have rolled by us, I became even better friends, unto a brother and brother-in-law and uncle to Craig and his entire family, and even an adopted poor relation to his parents who still live near me. The low adventures would continue. They would get Craig and I closer to the goal each time. We actually only had but a total 260 odd miles to do the whole trail, but it took us so long that we seemed slackers. But, I would not have had it any other way, brother.



Versing

Hollyhock Winter Pory Swoon

By Pi Kielty
(Posthumously)

*Inching one picture glass and windowless view, holly-
bush-hocks booming late, a-spined veins in summers deep
vain pink bloom, they wither over end, following the
autumnal cool.*

*The farm's ranch house wall clears, trimmed to my sad
inner window outward, a real garden yard world, brown,
brown, picked and prickly, stored or consumed.*

*Glassen look, though un-shattered, taken now void, a
soundful wind, crystalline night in icy gloom,
remembering pale death, for colorless buds whited seed,
exchanged to winter's dooms.*

*Chill-paid dues in February fields with frigid Wisconsin
driftened flats, those flying night dunes, do pawn my time
for a hollyhock soon. Holler prayer, praising future
vibrance to rejoin, color my light red window south true,
and relove the favored flowers, and a garden full at
season's noon.*

Checkyourhead List

By Superjunk

breathe

let in sunshine

pet dog

say I love you to dog

or whoever is near

one foot in front

of the other

turn on boombox

stoke fire

coffee

smile

stretch

belch

her name is edgar

try to remember dreams

poached egg

toast

butter

salt

pepper



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