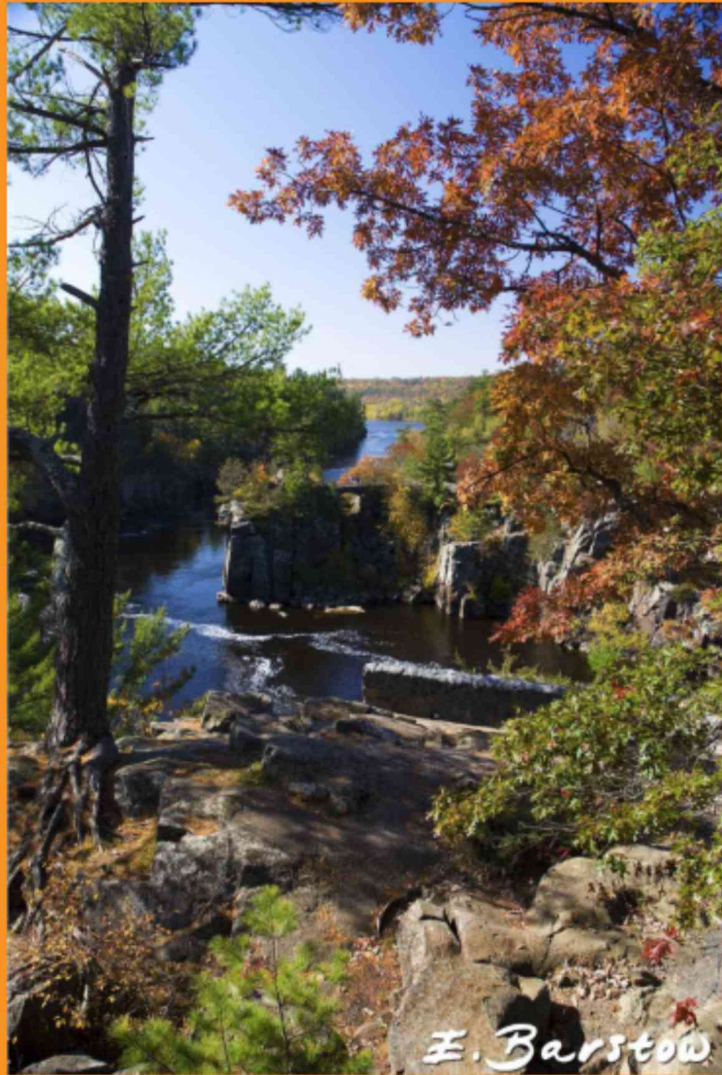


NormalcyMag

Exploring American Culture



Classicals of Fall

The Living Autumn

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NormalcyMag

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Welcome back for our third issue!
To remind readers and ourselves with
NormalcyMag's intent, we work from
the premise that institutions often
create labels like “normal” and “not
normal” to some how benefit
themselves, and usually to benefit for
a profit of some shape. Our magazine
believes that most average folks just
want their lives, their families, and
the places in which they live to fall
somewhere in the great between of
those extremes of “normal and not
normal.” In the everyday lives of
people, almost everyone just wants to
meet in the great middle of the world.
That place we can call “normalcy.”

In this issue, we hope we continued
the things that worked, and that we
always continue to learn from the
things that did not work in past
issues. As far as our selections in this
issue, we have the “Sub Terra Vita,”
the “Story,” and the “Low
Adventures” departments. We also
revisit our Reviews department,
which did not appear in the second
issue, but this time with a new
contributor, Mr. Glenn Schifflet of
the St. Croix Valley. The other
regular departments, “Versing” and
“Reflecting” will return in future
issues. Rest assured, this magazine
will grow and develop, and our
quality in presentation and content
will improve as we gain more
experience as a staff.

Finally, we should add some thoughts
about our business model. Under the
publisher, The Cepia Club LLC, we
want readers to keep all-access to the
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If at all possible, we also want to
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inexpensive or even free in certain
areas of the St. Croix Valley. We will
publish updates on locations where
readers can find the magazine. As a
magazine almost exclusively funded
by advertising sales revenue, we
beseech readers to enjoy our magazine
for what it offers within our limits, but
also grasp its opportunity: Normalcy
as the standard for great living in the
St. Croix Valley! Finally, as usual, I
offer the caveat for the readers:
Please, read with open mind!

Sincerely
Tim Krenz
Editor and Publisher

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Sub Terra Vita Chronicle

Autumn Introspect

By Tim Krenz

Autumn! I LOVE the fall, the twilight season to mark either a good year passing or the bad one about to finish. A new start to begin soon, but not before newer cool air comes in season. We see colors change in the tree leaves, far too quickly to appreciate them fully in their blazening of reds, oranges, yellows. Those bizarrely beautiful combinations stun all. The god paints on his canvas in Autumn. Yet, we never have patience in our crowded time of living to meditate on falling leaves, after the colors. At least not with as much patience as they deserve.

Falling leaves do not necessarily mean death or premonitions of death. Only a wrong appearance of death floats to the ground, as all but a very few trees continue living. Trees remain. Like life's burdens or things we collect, leaves fall from limbs because the living no longer need them. Whether deep pains or material things that we can shed like old skin, trees release their leaves in the windy cares of the world. And similar to the wisdoms we learned, leaves regenerate into the soil of the earth, and the leaves help nourish newer and fuller life. Leaves mulch and help growth for all other things, as well as the trees themselves. Even in the fall, as in other seasons, the essence of the trees remain and grow stronger. Like aging trees, even unto us, the added rings of age become as towering majestic statues of time. Oh, these mortal rings and coiled years! Let trees grow old, and we, too, but in strength not fragility.

For these things, I enjoy the Autumn. Fall, our last true breath of mild, warmer air until the vernal of the spring's release. But between fall and the spring, we have winter. Enjoy our autumns as we shall for winter brings cold light and chilling heaviness. Yet, even winter only lasts a short while. Fall! With the harvest of the earth, with a bounty of fun, with celebration, and with festival, we can make truly great times in Autumn. With some part of a lament, Time as the adjunct of our own space always lives, but ever forward. New times do come. Yet, we live to recapture the good ones in our new living season. Never, ever waste it. We can never make more time.

As from a mirror clearly, I see myself today. I can remember autumns of other years, and if I keep my life real today, I can keep my past real to me tomorrow, and despite a few remnants of sadness, I can carry mostly joys forward with me. But I remember, truly, one great memory of fall. One happy memory. I live it over in dreams sometimes, that memory about a game of playground football, a long time ago. . . .

Like all youth, I came from the impatient generation, growing up in Osceola. From kindergarten through sixth grade, my classmates and I started and finished elementary school in the same building where it remains today. I remember some of the notable highlights, besides learning the basics of the order, orthodoxy, and rigidity of society and our society's underwhelming expectations of young people, like then like now.


Of these various memories of youth, I remember one autumn day, in 4th or 5th grade, when my classmates and I dared to fly afield from the limits of school during recess, and we adventured to the "Holy Land," to play a pick-up game on the practice field of the high school football team. In our eagerness, our impatience to break new frontiers, we tried the patience of Mrs. W., the playground supervisor. The usual attraction of the fast kid "lipping" off the slow kid, and the slow kid, never quite able to catch the fast kid, had failed in its luster. We had bored ourselves, with our playground surroundings—the pavement, the swings and slides, the monkey bars, and the sick-go-round, early enough in the school year. I felt that limits, boredom, and rules sickened my sense of purpose. I do not remember who said it, but someone suggested, "Hey, let's go up the hill to play football." Time for fun.

The varsity football practice field, on the plateau of the Eighth Avenue hill, where Oak Court street now paves the Olympus of the gridiron titans, sat beyond our playground limits, south of our school, almost halfway to the high school and famous Oakey Park, down the other side of the hill. Of course, since we enjoyed only a short recess, we ran like Olympian sprinters up the "wagon path" between the forests of oaks and maples beginning their run to winter with the fall-bleeding of summer in orangish, yellow-red and brown-drab leaves, and past the rows of evergreen trees, quite young

and new. We knew, but not really, that we broke the rules of school.

At the top of the slope, I remember my awe on that obscure dirt-flown grass turf. On the western side of the field, beyond the blocking sleds, stood tall the wooden monolith, the goalpost made from round timbers—two tall posts, with a cross post halfway to their top. We must have chosen teams of 5 or 6 boys apiece. And as most normally happened, I probably got picked last. We could only have played for 5 or no more than 10 minutes, and I don't remember if either team scored, before faintly hearing the recall bell. I remember running as a group, down the slope on that wide path between the trees. I do not remember if we ran there for recess again, but I do think we found ourselves in a little trouble.

Because it no longer exist, except in lore, like the games of Olympus, I dare call it a “forgotten field,” a secret of Osceola's “small values” past, quite unrequited a place in the history of the village. It became nothing more than a former football practice field, and later a playground, covered with houses in the change of time. But somethings do change, good and bad, even the triumphant spirit of impatience.

My classmates and I did something, far beyond the risks of punishment then. We exceeded our own limits of courage, in a way, something not done and not condoned in today's world, and for very good reasons no longer allowed to mischievous, though innocent kids. As I think now, of then, I smile at our defiance, our quest to adventure, to exceed just a little, the limits placed by order, orthodoxy, and rigidity. In 1980, or thereabouts, we could. We lived, we merry miscreants, we gang of rebels, to win our time, on lost playing fields of Osceola. 



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Story

The “Whitch” Face By Pi Kielty (Posthumously)

Patti and her busty friend, Cindy, pulled into the parking a little before ten o'clock. The bright blue and red fluorescent signs along the top of the building and above the front door illuminated the dark night in this brightly lit, small suburban downtown.

From behind the steering wheel, Cindy began opening the door latch, but Patti interrupted and said, “Just a minute.” Patti pulled down the sun visor and the yellow light around the mirror illuminated on her beautiful round face, accenting the small, well-shaped nose in the shadow, and those famous amber and green eyes. Those eyes, one of which looked more green, the other looking more amber, would change their tether on men in certain light as the pupils grew larger or smaller, depending on the light and the dark of the mood in a room. Patti turned to look at both sides of her face, and checked the green face and skin make up on and behind her right-sized, perfect ears, and up the arms of her sleeves.

Drawing her brownish curly hair on either side of her face below the rim of her pointed black hat, she put the passenger's sun visor up, grabbed her broom from the backseat, and then said, “You sure this looks okay?”

“Don't worry,” Cindy told her. “You look great. I can't even tell its you.”

“Then, it's show time,” Patti said.

“All right!” Cindy said, getting excited for her confident friend and co-worker to meet some guys, finally, after the breakup last summer. “Got my car keys in the pocket, I.D., cash. Let's do it, girl! Let's rock this party!”

In a knotted frilly white shirt, and her short, short cut offs and high heels, Cindy led Patti by the hand to the door, where they waited in line for other Halloween revelers for the bouncer to check their age and collect a cover. When they arrived at the register inside the door, the bouncer with slicked hair and wearing overalls and straw gave them THE smile. “Looking good, ladies,” he said. “I need to check your I.D.'s, though, since I haven't seen you here before.”

He looked at the driver's licenses under the lamp resting on the counter. “Then again, I can't really tell if its you behind the green makeup, but it looks okay to me.” He took the \$10 bills each held out, and gave them each a stamp on the wrist, but the stamp would not hold over the green skin paint on Patti's hands. The bouncer did not notice, nor would he care. “Have a fun night, ladies.”

“Thank you,” they both said in unison, and in unison they walked through the double door into the main bar.

The sound of the thumping beat and the tricky tempo of the hopping words of the dance mix overwhelmed a sense, like feeling the air vibrate bangs in of sound. The dance club, gone spooky orange and black retro in décor for the night, all made it seem something else than real. Almost everyone wore diverse costume. The tweezing laser orange strobes zipping and dancing in golden, prismatic pinpoints on the smoke and dust in the room, gave the atmosphere appropriate homage to the hallowed night, its festive celebratory eve of the dead. The alcohol made it a party.

To the far corner of the club, along the black painted wall with orange crepe paper streaming from the high ceiling, Cindy pointed and yelled to Patti who could barely hear her, “There they are!”

Two men, both in normal clothes of jeans and T-shirts, the kind that looked unused and unreal—too unreal, but even less true—stood looking at the dance pit immediately below them. Cindy made her high-heeled strut and Patti followed carrying her broom through the crowd, some of that crowd a group dressed like pirates, three dressed as a sheikh with two harem girls in silk and goldish brocade, and others interesting in their imaginative costumes.

The girls arrived at the high table with two empty chairs waiting for them in the otherwise standing room club. When Cindy stopped her Duke mosey, she flicked her long and straight brown hair off her shoulders, gave one of the men a big

smile, a hug, and a long-smooch. Patti held her broom, her long black wicked witch cape swayed as she half turned to look at the dancers jumping and bumping in the pit.

When Cindy and her new boyfriend stopped their welcome dance, Cindy turned around and grabbed Patti by the broom and pulled her over. Yelling above the D.J. Mix, she told the man, "This is my friend from work I told you about!"

The boyfriend said, loudly so she could hear, "I'm Randy! Pleased to meet you! This tall fella is Mike!"

"Hi!" Patti said waving. "I'm Patti!"

Mike drew nearer, his face close to Patti. "Hi! What's your name?! You have to speak up! I have trouble hearing!" He pointed to the left side of his head.

"Patti!"

"Nice to meet you, Patti!" He almost had to shout now anyway, even despite his injured hearing. Patti could very well see the scar and burn on the side of his face next to his left ear. "What do you do, Patti?"

"For work? I'm a dental hygienist."

"Oh!" Mike replied. "Is Cindy a hygienist, too?! Randy said you and she work together?!"

"Well, I work on teeth! Keeping them clean and all! Cindy works as the receptionist!"

"Oh, now I get it!" Mike said. Patti's eyes caught a beam of the bright spot light that the stage hand in the catwalk above the dance floor began to shine around the pit. Her green face glistened from the moisture of the paint on her skin. The brownish, fair hair looked blonder as its curls framed her rounded cheeks. And the paint on her chin began to crack from the talking.

"Nice venue! For a Halloween party!" She told it to Mike as she looked at Cindy motioning for her to follow. "We'll be back! Looks like we're going to get something to drink! Need anything!"

Mike held up his beer and said, "No, I'm good! Let me buy you the first one!"

"No, please! I got this! You can buy the second!" With that, Patti smiled, and the green paint on her chin cracked more, and her dimples popped out.

With a vodka sour on ice in her hand, Patti and Mike restarted the conversation, trying to talk and hear each other above the boom pumping the throbbing dancers in the pit.

"How did you hurt your hearing?!"

"A car accident a couple of years ago!"

"Oh, I'm really sorry to hear that!"

"It's okay! No one died!" he said, shrugging his shoulders. Just then, Patti realized he focused on her eyes as the amber in the one eye changed its shape. "I just got used to it! How old are you!"

"Twenty-four!" She answered. "How old are you?!"

"Twenty-five in December!"

"Oooo, birthday boy coming up!"

"Yeah!" he said, with an awful shucksey smile.

"What do you do for a job?" Patti asked, lowering her head, but still looking up at the tall Mike, as she sipped some of her vodka sour through a straw.

"Software engineer!"

"Nice! What does Randy do again?!" Patti asked, turning her head to see Randy and Cindy sitting on the high stools at the tall table against the wall.



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“He's an electrical designer! He and I grew up together!”

“Where are you guys originally from?!” Patti wondered.

Mike told her. And as the conversation progressed Patti learned more about Mike, where he now rents an apartment with Randy, what he drives, where Mike and Randy went to school.

Just as the conversation needed to change topics, Cindy came up, grabbed Patti by the forearm of her flowing black witch dress, and said, “Girl friend, let's go!” Patti looked back at Mike, handing him her half finished drink, and Cindy pulled both of them through the throng of people. The next continuous mix over the over-thundering sound system began to play its rapping, hopping undergroove tune.

On the dance floor, Patti's black polyester costume unfurled lightly, the rolls of the cuffs and the tail of the train and cape flopped lightly with her moves around the fulcrum of her broom. Patti and Cindy swooned their bodies and hustled their ware, and the crowd swarmed in directions all around them. Too many people to see them clearly when they reached the center of the pit, Mike and Randy tried watching the girls and check out the goods, but the indefinity of wall mirrors on two sides of the floor made the dancers multiply. Then the fog machine started, and the colored stage lights flashed in red, blue and yellow, and Patti and Cindy found themselves near a man dancing with two women. He moved up to his new partners, and the new group of five—all costumed—gave the one man among them his feeling good and great grinning smile.

Cindy stepped on a small stage in the corner, up high and in the apex reflection of the corner connecting mirrors. She started a shaft dance on the pole in the middle of the stage. Her hot thighs below the cutoff shorts wrapping and warping themselves on the cold chrome. The one man dancer, dressed like a pimperlener in silvery framed sun glasses, elevator shoes and a leopard skin hat, left the other three woman to join her. One more minute later, he pulled gently on Patti's broom below him and she took the large step up on the dance stage. Now a group of three, after a minute Patti used her broom to sweep herself off the stage, making it through the dancers and up out of the pit to the corner table with Mike and Randy.

Back at the table, sweating, the green face and skin paint held good. “Oh, my god, she's crazy!” Patti said, laughing while looking at Cindy still dancing on the stage with the man. “That's why I love her so!”

When she turned her head to see if the guys had heard her, she saw that Randy and Mike looked unhappy, stern, and rather too serious for the fun. Too real, but untrue at once. It looked like more than any jealousy with Randy. It looked more like anger with Mike. Patti's amber in the eyes flared, turning the one less green, and the other much stronger in color, the way her father's eyes used to light up when he felt a change in mood.

“What's up guys?!” Patti said, grabbing her glass of vodka sour from the table. “She's just having fun!”

“Having fun, sure, but with the wrong color guy!” Mike said.


Patti looked wide with those amber and green tinted eyes. “Huh?! Oh, nothing to worry about. They're only dancing and having a silly moment!”

Patti looked back at the dance stage, and Cindy had disappeared, but the pimperlener guy now danced with the two other women, still on the stage, doing moves, doing grooves, now into a different club song, a hot, sawing beat, but in the rampaging mood of Halloween death disco industrial. Then Cindy showed up beside her, which startled Patti. Cindy had sweat all over face, and perspiration on her tied white blouse. Her brown hair, no longer kempt, had strands in her eyes, and cross strands around it from whipping her head and body around the pole. Patti grabbed Cindy and led her into the ladies restroom. Randy and Mike looked at each other, each with indignant scowls and raised eyebrows.

After a half hour since their disappearance, having looked around the club, Randy sent a woman he vaguely knew into the ladies restroom, once he described the two girls. The woman exited with a broom and a pointed, black witch hat. “No one else in there right now!” she said.

Later, at her apartment, Patti walked out of the bathroom following her shower, wearing her university sweatshirt she used as pajamas. All the green face and skin paint washed off completely, and with a towel wrapped around her curly brownish hair, she sat down on the chair at her vanity and looked at herself in the mirror, sweetly with confidence and with

her usual pride. She no longer kept a picture of her ex-boyfriend anywhere. He had run off with another girl over the summer, a rich girl whose parents lived on the rich lake, and who had a sailboat, and a speedboat.. She did not hate him, but neither would she lament his passing from her life full of future promises.

To her left, in front of the vanity mirror, she admired the framed anniversary photo of her parents. They still looked young, healthy as ever, and had the happy loving look between them they had until her father's tragic death. Patti had his eyes, the amber in the one, the green predominate in the other. His cheeks and brow she shared, too, but with her own soft and feminine trim, but the dimples, nose, and the chin belonged to her mother. She never, ever wondered in her life what the “wrong color” meant. Patti looked at her face, her skin a perfect silkiness like her mom still had, from years of care and the good genes of her family. Her father's color, different, and strong, with confidence, and his pride, she shared slightly more. She felt still closer to him three years after his accident. 

Review ***A Discussion of Values*** ***by Glenn Schiflett***

It's rare when a book, written by a politician, comes along and the content is not political. Ben Sasse's book *The Vanishing American Adult* (St. Martin's Press, NY, 2017), surprisingly, is such a book.


Also part of the surprise is Sasse himself. He's the junior senator from Nebraska, from a small rural town, fifth generation Nebraskan, Ph.D. in History from Yale, father of three children, forty-five years old, having held government positions in the Department of Justice and Health and Human Services. He taught at the University of Texas-Austin and became a fellow there in 2009. When he was thirty-seven he became president of Midland University in Fremont, NE, turning the school around from near bankruptcy to a sustainable, high-quality liberal arts college. In 2016 he was part of a stop-Trump effort in the U.S. senate as a moderately conservative Republican.

The book's thesis is that we're in trouble, right here in the St. Croix Valley. We've lost our way. We no longer have a common understanding of what our values, as Americans, are. The answers, for Sasse, lie in the values of family and community, in loving our neighbors as ourselves, in overcoming peer pressure to over-consume, in hard work and the pursuit of goals, and—importantly—in taking and accepting responsibility for ourselves, our families, our children. All of this strikes me as NormalcyMag-systemic.

Sasse's model for being a good American is reflected, for me, in my paternal grandparents— of Aberdeen, South Dakota — poor, very poor, and hard-working. They sent their three children to college in the 1920's on the wages of my grandpa's barbershop and the paltry income from a plot of land outside of town. Margaret was a pillar of the local Presbyterian church and the local Republican chairwoman. She made the best lemon meringue pie in prairieland. When I was growing up, we went to watch the Pheasants play ball at the local stands. She loved baseball.

The problems Sasse outlines are legion these days: kids are passive, high school testing shows American kids only at the lower-middle of the pack of developed countries in science, math and reading (Pew Research, 2015). Kids are simply not growing up. We live in a spiritually empty country. Sasse and his wife, Melissa, home-schooled their kids because they really wanted the kids to get a good education. They challenged their kids, and made them work. And challenging their kids, and the kids at Midland University, worked.

I don't think Sasse goes quite far enough. While he speaks of recognizable American values that we can see out on the prairie — which presumably were derived from the opening up of the West in a survive-or-die setting — the message could easily be lost on Harlem or North Minneapolis parents. Anthropologist Joseph Campbell said we need a common mythology to survive. I suggest we collectively see ourselves, all of us, as immigrants in the land called the future. I mean *all of us*, even Native American Indians; they too immigrated here, just a bit earlier than the rest of us.

The Vanishing American Adult is an easy and quick read and worth the effort. And if you're like me you'll feel better having read it. Go ahead: Challenge yourself. 

The Low Adventures: Trekking Superior Hiking Trail Part 3: Into the Naked Forest

By Tim Krenz

While trail maps without much detail as to topography do not outright lie, they do have a certain deception. They do not, though, deceive as badly as a guide book. A trail map in a guide book, well that comes between a half truth and a very good sales pitch.

For our next trip to the Superior Hiking Trail, one of the low adventures of Mueller and Krenz backpacking, we did not use the highly detailed, glossy maps Craig would later purchase for future trips. We had not even “upgraded” to the small flip book of maps we would use the next year, either. I use the word upgraded very cautiously, because as we found out, the flip books provided no better than the blurry, information-deprived maps out of a guide book. At least for this trip, Craig bought a newer version of the guidebook, which updated our information by almost a decade from that used in the first, uncertain trip a few months earlier, in June, 2002.

For this trip, we used just those maps photocopied out of the newer book. As I might add, the photocopies did not reproduce that well. Hence, we had very little detail on which to navigate while we hiked. As a backup plan for this and all future trips, we quickly reaffirmed the hikers golden trail rule: STAY ON THE TRAIL! It proved a good rule, until a winter camping trip over a year later, but generally the rule held for most of our trips on the Superior Hiking Trail. We stayed, invariably, on the trail.

We took our trip this time in October, very late in the month, on a raining day with chilling air. As I remember, vividly by their absence, the leaves mostly had fallen to the ground along the north shore of Minnesota. Those few remaining leaves turning a decaying drab of colors mostly brownish, and the wet ones on the ground sounding loud as we sloshed on them, we stepped out of the vehicle into a leafless woods. That drizzling, chilly afternoon, as my father celebrated his 69th birthday with our family back home, Craig and I grabbed our packs from the bed of the green little pickup truck, put the packs over our shoulders, fastened and tightened the straps, and headed into the naked forest.

Leaving the Caribou Creek parking lot, heading up the trail northeastward, we literally headed “up the trail.” For the first mile of the hike, we walked, painfully for out of shape guys, and always uphill. Again, the mild deception of fuzzy photocopied maps did not abate the sheer self-deception of our high ambitions. Instead of a book or map seduction via a “We can do this easy-squeazy”-delusion, the experience highlighted our self-deception. The exuberant enthusiasm of a greenhorn backpacker will not contribute to the trail hiking savvy except by experience.

Craig and I did not foresee at that point on our trail quest that the Superior Hiking Trail creators followed one golden rule before all others for weekend camp poets like me: The trail must always try and go uphill and otherwise follow the path of most resistance. They who made the trail, we believed, hated flat, easily walked ground. If the trail could avoid easy, less punishing paths in favor of a steep challenges or a rigorous detours, the trail almost always followed the harder ways.

After the first mile “straight uphill,” we followed the next mile and a little more on a slight incline until we arrived at Crystal Creek Campsite. Since it still rained when we arrived, Craig and I established our camp quickly. I filtered water at the creek through a clogged, hand-held camp pump which Craig brought with us, and Craig pitched his large, and heavy, four man blue tent, which slept two with gear inside it rather comfortably.

As the first noticeable thing at almost every developed and maintained campsite, the latrine forms a vital part of the site's wilderness architecture. Taken together with the fact that when needed, in an emergency situation, checking out the latrine becomes an inevitable duty when setting up camp. In daylight, on the lower side of the hill (downhill!) of the tent pad, the latrine at Crystal Creek looked all the more typical of the campsites we found on the Superior Hiking Trail. Made of a hardened fiberglass conical shape sitting on its wider end, hopefully with some form of cover over it to keep critters from going inside the seat-less rim, the platform base of the cylinder just sat over a hole in the ground, a hole into which no one wants the latrine contraption to fall while sitting. Without moderate cover or natural camouflage to hide

the user from view, this latrine used a fence of plank boards to provide some common privacy to the modest camper. Still, with a purposely-built latrine, one did not have to hang out in the woods, over a downed tree limb using tricky acrobatic formulae to stay balanced.

Further along the main trail from the campsite, crossing the direction we would continue the next day, ran the Crystal Creek, flowing down the hill. Down some steps, fifteen feet below, the creek ran through a large mini-gorge, the rocks and crystalline formations overhanging the water course as it streamed. Just below the campsite, we saw the remnants of some type of copper mine.

And still on the main trail beyond our camp, crossing over the creek, Craig and I marveled at a true and ambitious piece of wilderness architectural design and construction. We saw a long, narrow, wooden, covered footbridge—with open sides waist-high and up, railings, and a peaked roof of shingles (wood shakes, I recall, but without certainty).

“You know, Tim,” Craig the civil engineer observed to me, while we stood in the misting drizzle, “people had to carry all of those materials out here, over the trail, by hand or by some type of cart. I can't see how even a four-wheeler [A.T.V.] could have managed what we just walked through.”

I thought Craig's comment most astute.

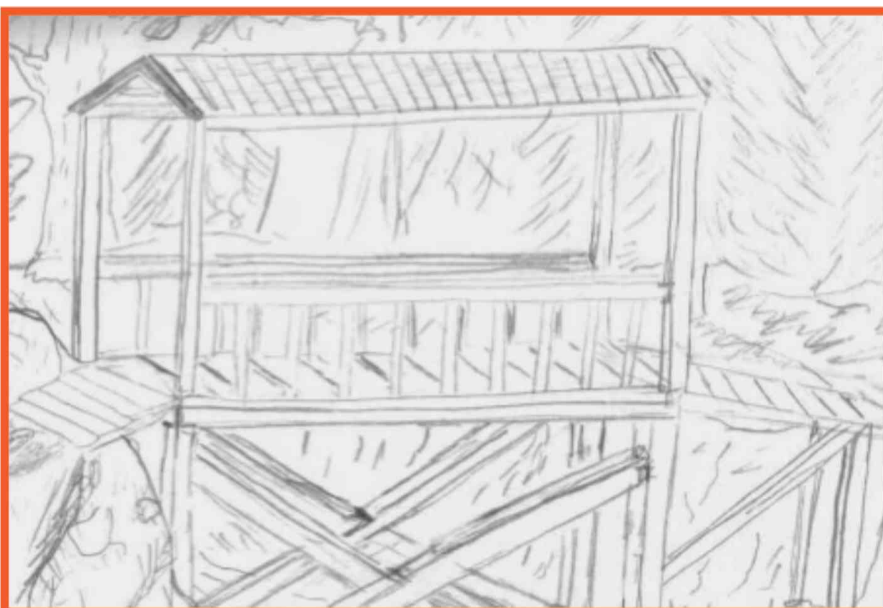
“Plus,” he continued, “no power tools—built it by hand. They might have pre-cut the beams and boards, or had to carry a generator and fuel with them, too. Either way, that's impressive.”

A covered, old-fashioned colonial-looking footbridge gave both the forest and the creek some semblance of civilized esteem in the rather somber, brownish and gray woods. It looked at once out of place, but rather appropriate, even dignified, there over the creek.

As far as I can recall, we never again saw such a humbly-sized, well-shaped and -crafted structure quite like it on any of the trips backpacking the trail. Whoever built it amazed me, and their hard work would impress anyone. Someone built it, whether the committed trail volunteers who maintained the paths, or the civic group who did the project for some reason unknown.

All this time, the rain continued to drizzle. I looked into my mini-binoculars through the bare topped trees down the valley to the east, toward the big lake, Superior, which I could see in glimmering mirrored reflections of its gray waters on this dreary, wet, cold day. Craig used his cell phone to call his wife, to check in, let her know we made it, and to ensure that she would pick us up in two days. Jen, Anya, and Craig's engineering co-worker, Liz, planned to hotel hop around the north shore for the next day and night, and to meet us on Sunday, somewhere around late-morning.

A memorable part of the day came when Jen told Craig, who repeated it so I could hear, that the U.S. Senator, who promised to serve only two terms, died in an accident while campaigning for his third term. It shocked us, and as I lived



Left: The author's post-trip rendition of the famed covered bridge on the Superior Hiking Trail (S.H.i.T), in the low adventures of Mueller and Krenz. Perhaps not exactly the way it looked in reality, the author remembered it this way. A more timely drawing and better drawing skills might have made the difference in how it actually looked.

and voted in Wisconsin, I felt somewhat neutral about the guy's politics. Like any pointless death on the earth, the god keeps his own appointments for us, regardless of our politics.

Since it continued to rain, and the rain increased its pace, Craig and I retreated to the tent as it began to grow dark. The view of the lake to the east disappeared into the mist of now falling sky water. It felt like time for the comforts of my new synthetic fiber-filled sleeping bag, for some supper of re-hydrated freeze-dried meals, and to relax with the copy of the novel *Amerika!*, by Franz Kafka, that I brought to read for this trip.

Underneath the tent's opened rain fly and vestibule, outside the unzipped front door of the tent, Craig boiled water on a gas stove, one that he would replace by the time of our spring trip. When the water roiled and pulled itself up the sides of the aluminum cook-kit pot, he poured the scalding water into his Mexican tortilla meal and into some sort of Cantonese shrimp meal for me. These bags of warm, slowly growing pieces of salty veggies and meat, along with some snacks of venison jerky and chocolate, served as our supper for the evening.

Since I could not eat all of my dinner, I found it too bland and salty, Craig suggested I dispose of it in the latrine—a campsite “no-no” of putting anything but human waste in the pit. Outside, walking briefly in the rain by flashlight, I threw the remaining contents of the aluminum foil bag into the latrine, and put the bag in the garbage bag inside the tent vestibule. Unusually for us, compared to our later trips, we did not secure the food and the other “smellies” (like toothpaste, deodorant, even cook kits, etc.) into a bag hung from a rope thrown over a high and convenient tree branch. We had no consciousness of any bears in our early low adventures. Later, due to some of the freaky signs we did see on some trips, we henceforth always secured the food and the “smellies” on a “bear rope.”

At some point, Craig fell asleep, reading by candlelight some book. I read Kafka by flashlight, and I fell asleep much later, probably near mid-night. I slept pretty fitfully, but my trip notes say I had a dream of some cross of the movies *Damnation Alley* and *The Planet of the Apes*. Even now, it sounds like a good story, but I do not remember how it went.

The next morning, we woke, boiled water for instant oatmeal, packed up and headed up the trail at 9:30 AM for a six mile hike to the next site at Dyer's Creek at Two Island River. On that morning and all afternoon, it sleeted its half snow and half rain off and on again and again, and before we stopped for a lingering lunch of hot soup and coffee, the sky turned into a menacing cloud covered gray. We crossed rugged country, at the tops of steep cliffs, over one-plank footwalks across really large marshlands and bogs, and by the very beautiful Alfred's pond, at which we rested and I meditated. We arrived at the camp at 2:30 PM. While we set up camp like before, Craig found a camper's thermometer hanging by a string on a broken tree branch. He used it quite often on later trips, and that day later in the afternoon it read thirty degrees, Fahrenheit, and it dropped from there as night crept over us.

We played with a stubborn fire, getting us just warm enough after two hours so we could eat the re-hydrated stew Craig concocted at home and heated on his rapidly failing gas stove. And then needing to let it die due to the cold and rain, we let fire go out and went to our tent. I had a thin foam pad, and not just ground upon which I needed to sleep. I did not realize then that I needed to upgrade that pad into something more comfortable. Still, though, it got damn cold, and I felt damn cold sleeping. Craig commented before he fell asleep that it could get colder if the low clouds did not linger to rain and sleet on us. Soon, I would buy a proper camping self-inflating sleeping pad, but I did not learn that lesson good enough that night.

The next day, we backpacked with lighter packs the last, easy 1.1 miles to the next parking lot. I did a cold shave and washed up where we sat by the road, at the entrance to the treeline that partially concealed the dirt parking lot in the middle of nowhere, in northeastern Minnesota. Jen, Anya and Liz drove up, and they gave Craig a ride to the mini-pick-up truck at Caribou River while I sat against a fence post and watched the gear.

I sat alone, reading Kafka. Then, I heard a heavy banging noise in the lot. It sounded like a piece of metal on a hinge, like a garbage dumpster would sound, swinging on a hinge and banging. Just then, Craig drove toward me on the dirt gravel road along the grassy, treeless clearing stretch separating one side of the forest from the other. When Craig stopped, I put the gear into the truck bed and hopped in the passenger seat. Craig pulled into the lot to turn around. I saw a small dumpster, opened, while the lot looked otherwise empty.

“Huh,” I said to myself. I never did try to explain the mystery that made that noise. 