

#20  
Barbara Sparks  
Kami Mendlik – “Into the Silver Lining”



**Honorable Mention Award**

I Am This Path

The pink, orange and lavender sun setting in the distance is a reminder to hurry along before the evening darkness envelopes me and the surrounding grasslands. In reluctance I tarry, the brilliance reaching deep into my being.

I have walked this path so many times. This path of tall grasses not far from home. This path is a part of me. I am a part of this place, this land, miles and miles of boggy grasses, dried shades of black, brown and gold alert in the dimming light.

Like Aldo Leopold, there are those who can live without wild things, and some who cannot. I am one who cannot.

The marsh grasses skimmed with ice, of cold November temperatures when I wrap myself in woolen sweater, hat and hand-warmer filled mittens, my felt lined sorrels and woolen socks. Sloshing through drainage water amongst the reeded grasses my eyes and ears search the sky for v-shaped formations. My ears on high alert. Waiting to be surrounded with the moment's desire.

Canadian geese fill the skies arcing one last time as they find water lanes they seek. The synchronized honking, thousands of long necked geese is deafening. Like a drum, my chest reverberates with each beat pushing down and out my feet into the wet earth. I hold my breath, getting dizzy with the sound.

Centuries long ritual led by instinct, the Canadian geese overtake the restful fields to regain strength and feed on the grains of the tall winter grasses. This landscape bred into my bones. This landscape bred into theirs where they return year after year.

I wander alone along the edges of the boggy marsh fields, a woman who grew up in the hinterlands, played in sand piles and pine forests, studied tree frogs, crossed wide lakes in my metal fishing boat to inlets of mystery, attended out-door church services and solo camped in national wilderness areas once I'd grown. I walk alone, feeling the sharp rasp of grasses against my arms and pant legs. This habitat is feral, deep and lodged in limbs and bone, in spirit and mind. My simple energy merges with the landscape and my physical boundaries blur and dissolve. For a few seconds, I witness this phenomenon of being connected in the universe.

The wildness of this winter place surrounding harvested corn fields beckons to anyone who wanders here. Human markers of planted and tilled fields, sustaining food supplies, fodder feed or fallow live side by side, or at least try, with our air-borne compatriots, the Canadian geese. What compromises must each make to co-exist?

Long ago we humans invaded and took over landscapes for our own purposes, landscapes already teeming with life above and below ground. Science verifies our interdependence, yet so many people see wildness and nature separate from their own being. Some people even fear the wildness, as if it were not part of their very sustenance. We exist not alongside, but inside, part of the whole of natural reality.

So sit on your porch or patio distanced by the lounge chair you sit in, umbrella shielding the sun. Then observe the surrounding beauty, the Willow trees, the chirping birds, the twinkling stream water, the clouds overhead. Try to feel the ground under your feet and your long roots into the earth linking with that tree standing next to you. Begin a thought experiment where you

are a sturdy contributing energy source for the growth of that tree. Feel the connection as you receive the life energy flowing into you.

Fred Rodgers reminds us there is something of ourselves that we leave at every meeting with another person, and, by extension, with another living entity. There is no such thing as “leave no trace”, a common wilderness anthem. We leave traces wherever we go, just as traces are etched into us as we traverse landscapes of our everyday life.

I am this path, I am this landscape.