

RED SKY AT NIGHT

Narrative: Sue Schuit

SEPTEMBER

September - Harvest month, Artists month; September is not a month for gamers, city dwellers, couch potatoes, silence seekers or (yes this is true) armchair quarterbacks.

September is the month to stockpile memories and images which will feed our soul in the not too distant future. In September quiet, cold, pale, bare austerity is unimaginable and almost impossible to contemplate.

Mother Nature is kind to us here in Wisconsin. She knows that we are prone to somberness. We are not overly flamboyant, not naturally exuberant, sparing in praise and in general, emotionally a tad thrifty. So she is gentle; she allows us to warm to her gradually and she grants us glimpses of her beauty in small doses she believes we can handle.

But by September Mother Nature raises her voice, casts off her shades, and allows us to look her fully in the eyes. She is sensitive to OUR nature and knows well that instant eye to eye contact would blind us and too-excited-too-soon singing may simply irritate.

Are there any original words or descriptions yet possible for September? Are there fresh, unique pictures or images still to create? The attempts are innumerable, the successes few. The frustrations I imagine are many for writers and painters; why even the great master of light, Monet said, "to paint directly from nature, striving to render my impression in the face of the most fugitive attempts".

September in Wisconsin; its short, move quickly, you don't have much time; this isn't Provence, we aren't in Giverny, this golden light will not last long. Colors now are wild, flashy, deep and glowing, intense, saturated and rapidly shifting and changing. One field of grasses contains countless colors, deep greens becoming gold, changing to mauve and ending in wispy duns, overlaid and hi-lighted by the golden air and intense blue of a September sky. Really, how many times do we stop in our tracks, struck by the sheer, audacious and intense beauty; turn down or off the TV, phone or radio and simply enjoy the raucous cicadas, non-stop cricket song, the night chorus of tree frogs, the song of life surrounding us everywhere?

Beautiful in Fall

"Red sumac, yellow goldenrod, purple gentians, green-blue spruce, brown-eyed susans, blue grape clusters among bright green leaves, aquamarine waters, purple-black chokecherries, yellow basswood leaves, bright bronze sunflowers nodding beneath the weight of their own seeds, and lacy cobwebs putting a filmy haze over the colors now previewing fall. Little Lakes is never more beautiful than in fall. There are maples soon ready to take fire and birch that will turn into golden arrowheads. All the flowers are flamboyant. They are the last glory, the final flame before the drab days." – Mel Ellis *Notes from Little Lakes*.

Black Sheep

It's one thing to be a black sheep. It's another to be the grand black sheep in my noble family of Maple. Critics will note that I am a now-sub-species of the Sugar Maple. I may note that jealousy may have played a part in such label. I may be more popular than perhaps my family care to admit (or accept). The Sugar Maples, yes, they act as if they are not jealous, after all it's not often they are upstaged. Certainly my fall color will rival and my black trunk will surpass that of any cousin. I think in the end, the Sugars are happy to out-number me.

I digress. I do agree with the narrator; September is a glorious month, a beautiful golden, sun-drenched month. But I prefer October.

September on my grounds is undeniably beautiful. The well-groomed, wonderfully maintained gardens are in full glory. The shady, serene paths; the colorful walkways, the brick lanes lined with various species of hostas, ferns and astilbes, the rose covered archways and the wooded trails, the blue of the lake to the east and of course, the beautiful gothic architecture of the buildings that comprise The DeKoven Center are well-known and loved by all.

I am one of many magnificent trees on this land –that is, until October. October is my time to shine. A hint can be expected in September; but it's just a bit too soon. The gold light cast on my green suggests the first indications of orange. But not yet, it's not quite right - a shift in the light, a change in the pace, longer nights, shorter days, the deep earthy scent and then... I become the star of the show.

The Vision

"The DeKoven Center began as Racine College, founded and chartered in 1852. In 1859, Dr. James DeKoven came to Racine College and became Warden of the College. Under Dr. Dekoven's leadership, Racine College became a prominent institution of higher learning. Mary Todd Lincoln visited the campus, considering the school for her son Tad. Ralph Waldo Emerson lectured here, and later, General Billy Mitchell was a graduate. Dr. DeKoven himself gained fame as a preacher and writer, and is commemorated every year on March 22nd. James DeKoven died in 1879, and the college continued in one form or another until the Great Depression forced its closing in 1933.

In subsequent years the Community of St. Mary took title of the property and the Sisters operated Saint Mary's Camp for Girls in the summer and established a retreat and conference center until 1985, at which time the Sisters transferred the property to the Episcopal Diocese of Milwaukee.

The old college motto, *Vigat Radix* (May the Root Thrive) is as appropriate today as it was in the 1850's. The work of the Foundation thrives today as a retreat and conference center" – The DeKoven Center, A Brief History, 1852-2003.

My grounds and I, we share the same past. We are the dream and the vision of the same circumstance.

“One of Racine County’s most intriguing and extraordinary Landmarks is The Dekoven Center, once known as Racine College. The Center is a comprehensive facility continuing 140 years of education, recreation and spiritual reflection. It is located in Racine’s historical district with a picturesque view of beautiful Lake Michigan.

The Center, of English Gothic Revival design, was constructed with creamed colored bricks and is enhanced by its natural beauty of 40 acres filled with tall trees and prairie grasses.

Together, the buildings and their surroundings create a magnificent atmosphere of tranquility and peacefulness.” – *Racine County, Wisconsin 1993*

RED SKY AT NIGHT

October evening lit by starlight
The crisp, cool air,
A perfect fall night.

The colors, my heavens, look at that tree!
Are they Maroon? Merlot? Crimson?
I would say Burgundy doesn’t quite do,
While they may be dim in this light, I see some yellows too.
There are auburns and ginger; hey look at the ground,
The fallen leaves are still shining, they glow all around.

What? You still don’t see the tree?
That one over there, look you can see
Here, right there, follow my finger, let your eyes adjust to the night.
Can you see the tree shining in this starlight?
Let’s go look up close, Holy Smoke!
Imagine the colors, how awesome, lit by the sun!
Let’s come back tomorrow, let’s look at then...
Come under the branches, can you see through the leaves
That star there that’s so bright?
No really, Mark look, sigh, for goodness sake...men.
The leaves on the tree, the leaves all around
The shadowed oranges and reds, they color the ground.
Not only that but look up above us, right there
This tree’s colors can be seen well past twilight.
Amazing, this tree is its own sunset and would rival
Any red sky at night.

The buildings endure,
The grounds beautifully maintained.
Here at DeKoven,
Time’s not forgotten

The memories linger,
remain.

I'm here, I remember
History safely kept.
The old college motto,
May the Root Thrive,
I'm here, I remember,
I too survive.

Sue Schuit

TREES WE LOVE, 2018
HOY AUDUBON SOCIETY
BLACK MAPLE (ACER NIGRUM)
APPROX. AGE 170 YEARS
DIAMETER AT BREAST HEIGHT: 40"
HEIGHT: 65'
SPREAD: 65'
PROUD STEWARDS: THE DEKOVEN CENTER, 600 21ST ST., RACINE, WI
NOMINATOR: RALPH ANDERSON