

172

Nature  
By Kathryn Cubalo

It's hard to imagine anyone who doesn't love and enjoy the natural world. Maybe we Olsons come by it genetically as our parents and grandparents loved each and every flower or tree that grew. One of my favorite memories of my mother was the annual trek to the woods on May 1 to see if the arbutus were blooming. There was a patch on a knoll on the back forty. The blooms were not only the first in spring, but beautiful and had a most wonderful smell. We always picked just a few (my mother knew it was not good to pick too many), but I do remember occasions when we tried to mail some to my aunt and uncle in Seattle. It was not successful as they dried up in the mail. We often received some holly from them at Christmas from the tree in their yard.

My Dad loved the woods, too. After I was married and had kids, whenever we visited in the summer, he hitched the wagon to the tractor and took us all for a ride through the trails. We do the same now with our grandchildren on our property, or, more often, we all go for a walk. Our abundance of deer has eaten most of the trillium and wintergreen, but we still find Jack-in-the-pulpit, violets and, sometimes, marsh marigolds.

We always look forward to the berry season. If we get enough rain and some warm days, we find lots of blackberries. Lately, the crop has not been very plentiful. Maybe the dry weather is a result of global warming.

In my early childhood, we often visited my grandparents' farm. My Aunt Helen was still single then, and I have warm memories of her taking my brother and me to the creek. Sometimes we skipped part of the way. She would call our attention to the various wild flowers and small fish and frogs in the creek.

I'm not sure who taught us, but when we were quite young, we learned to identify trees. We knew that the poplar could be cut for pulp wood, but the oaks need to be left to grow large enough for lumber. My Dad often came home from work and went to the woods with the chain saw. He enjoyed the work outdoors and could make a little extra money.

When we decided to build a place in Alcona, we thought about the lake or maybe Lost Lake Woods Community. We eventually decided we wanted some woods. Water and beach are nice, but we enjoy being surrounded by trees.

We also have the advantage of being able to go to hunting camp. One year, we went there in the winter with our cross-country skis. We took hot dogs and had a winter picnic by the little stream we call "the falls." Now that it is sold, we will miss visiting that woods way off the paved roads.

Not everyone enjoys the country. One time, our son-in-law's parents came to visit for a few days. We thought it would be a nice outing to take them to the hunting camp. Percy said, "Well, it's only woods, isn't it?" He wanted to visit the nearest town. We were disappointed that they didn't seem to appreciate our country living.

I suppose it's not surprising that I have become an environmentalist. I'm horrified by the oil spills in the oceans and the removal of mountain tops for coal. I'm excited by the idea of energy from the sun and wind, electric cars with no pollution, and even tractors and lawn mowers without those awful fumes. We are not there yet, but maybe someday the earth will be clean and pure once more as it was in the beginning.