

Reflections: The Nature of Warm Summer Days at Wildwood

I mentioned in one of my earlier articles that one of my childhood dreams was to be a forest ranger. That interest encompassed rocks, minerals, birds, plants, animals and I guess all of nature. I could have been happy as a County Agent advising people on how to eradicate noxious weeds and rodents to improving crop yield or working for the Division of Wildlife, a geologist or even an astronomer. Well, I chose electrical engineering instead, which I've certainly never regretted, but at the same time I've never lost my intense interest in nature.

Most of us at Wildwood have worked, or are still working, in cities while having to bear the objectionable noise of industry, motor vehicles, sirens, dogs and other man produced noise. The tumultuous pace and demands of city life is enormous. The pavement, freeways, bill boards, trains, tall buildings, blaring music, booming thumps from amplified bass sounds in teenage cars and all sorts of racket is unsettling to put it mildly. These are the byproducts of our society. They are the signs of concentrated human life; the signs of progress; the signs of prosperity. But it is far from the quiet peaceful existence that most of us would be more comfortable with. This may be especially true if our childhood was rooted in a rural atmosphere as both Faye and I were.

We had our septic tank cleaned out this last summer. The service man commented several times about how quiet and peaceful our area is. He stated that he would give anything to be able to get away from the city life and live in this kind of setting. I'm sure we all agree with that feeling or we wouldn't go to the expense and time of escaping to it every opportunity that we have.

One of the real neat things about life at Wildwood is that it allows us the opportunity to be close to nature. We love the *warm summer days* when nature is at its grandest. We cherish the quiet peaceful times sitting on the deck when it is so quiet that you can hear the crickets, grass hoppers, flies, birds and squirrels chattering-seldom a vehicle, no sirens nor dogs barking. These are the sounds of nature added to the background quietness that is almost tangible.

You can observe unique characteristics and personalities of birds, squirrels and anything that moves. You can also observe, up close and personal, the unique characteristics and beauty of plants, wildflowers, and indeed anything that doesn't move.

You can hear the whir of the humming bird wings and watch them go thru their dive bomb antics; an aggressive little rusty-brown Rufus chasing a more docile yet feisty green broadtail. You can hear the woodpeckers drumming on hollow wood during their mating season or tapping on the trees in search of insects. There is the soft haunting song of a mourning dove calling for a mate or just being happy. You may hear the beautiful song of a yellow rumped warbler. You can hear the raucous calls of the Clark's Nutcrackers and Stellar Jays and watch

them flip pine cones up in the air trying to dislodge the seeds. You can hear the mew of a catbird or western kingbird or the musical notes of a song finch. You hear the soft chick-a-dee-dee-dee of the friendly little chickadee and hear its little claws as they tap along the railing. You see a hyper little chipmunk and hear the patter of its tiny paws as it scurries around you on the deck. You can even hear a tired pine cone from last year's growth drop with a soft thud on the ground.

You can watch the lovely bluebirds fly to a perch and watch patiently for an insect to move. It swoops down and pounces on an insect. Then it flies directly to a perch in front of the nest box that you've built, waiting to fly to the entrance and deliver the insect to its ravenous young. You can watch the white breasted and pygmy nuthatches hanging upside down on a tree limb searching for insects. A beautiful yellow swallow-tailed butterfly flits by looking for some nectar. A tree swallow darts around overhead looking for winged insects, silhouetted against the clear blue sky.

You can walk around and enjoy the trees, rocks, flowers and grasses on your very own property. We call it "walking the acres." Even our children and grandchildren will ask during a visit, "can we walk the acres" with you? We can talk about the growth of the seedling trees we've planted; observe the rabbit guards we've made; observe with disgust a few trees that have been stunted or ringed and killed by porcupines; look for miniature cactus; examine the wildflower blossoms; talk about the granite and white marble outcroppings of rock; Look for the night hawk nest; look at the erosion control measures we've taken; observe a large cluster of pine cones around the base of a pine tree and know that a squirrel nest is in that pine tree somewhere; listen for it to chatter, then spot it; I point out the many bird boxes that I've made and know what type of bird is or has nested in it this season and even know when the fledglings left. We look for arrow heads as we mosey around and wonder if a human has ever stood on this very spot and if so, who and when. Then we gather some pine cones for Christmas decorations and retire to the quiet serenity of our deck for a cold drink; and enjoy the company of each other in pure peace and quiet.

You can lean back and look at infinity in the blue-blue sky. You've unquestionably never seen a sky so blue. The silence is golden. You watch a red tailed hawk, some vultures, two ravens or an occasional golden eagle soar effortlessly on the invisible air currents. The sound of a jet, far above, interrupts the serene atmosphere. You search for the jet. A speck of silver appears far in front of the sound followed by a short white contrail that lengthens. It's like an unseen hand throwing a javelin high above you. Where is it heading you think? Then it is gone. You forget the beautiful but obnoxious interruption. You observe little puffy clouds form directly above you from out of nowhere in the clear blue sky. They condense into rain clouds before your eyes as the air currents pass over the coolness of the Pike National Forest to our east. Occasionally about noon, these puffy clouds may darken and bless us with a shower of precious rain. Then in the pure crystalline air toward the east we may be blessed with a double rainbow, many times

clearer than ever in the city. Twenty minutes later our landscape is refreshed and sparkles with drops of rain on the pines and grass. The wildflowers spring up from their quasi wilted state and add a brilliance of color not matched in the city.

It is a wonderful feeling to look out over the small trees that you have planted and reflect on having created a landscape of beauty with your own hands. The hard work of planting and watering is a distant memory- now only the satisfaction of enjoying the fruits of your labor.

In the early morning and particularly late afternoon you can watch dozens of birds flapping their wings in the bird bath, some very timid, some very aggressive about it. You can watch a parent trying to entice a fledgling into the water. The fledgling attempts to mimic its parent, dips a toe in, wades in a few inches and promptly retreats. Then it gets a little braver the next time and finally is joyfully flapping its wings like a boy on a hot summer day at a swimming hole. The wonder of it all obliterates any thoughts of the hard work that went into the building or maintenance of it.

As the still bright sun starts to set in the still blue sky, you can hear the night hawks whistle and watch them dive from great heights, then hear the eerie high pitched swoosh of the wind through their primary wing feathers as they pull out of their dives. Then they fly upward to a great height and do it again.

The sun sinks lower and evening sets in. The clear yellow sun sinks behind the Continental Divide to the west while its rays penetrate upward toward the now purple cast sky overhead. You have a momentary flash back of the horrible looking red sun trying to penetrate the brown cloud in California, sometimes even in Denver. Erase the thought. Beautiful orange clouds appear in the azure blue sky above where the sun just disappeared. You watch in awe as the sunset changes from a brilliant orange, then red, gradually fades, and gives way to darkness.

Stars start to appear- one by one - faint at first, then brighter and brighter. As darkness sets in, the day sounds of the birds subside and may give way to the wild hooting sounds of a great horned owl. You hurry to see where. There it is, high in that big ponderosa. Each time it hoots, it raises its tail high and it leans over like a giant coo-coo bird in a clock; whoo-whoowhoo-whoowhoo it calls. There is an answer in the distance. The hair on your neck prickles up. What a memory.

The moon peeks over the Lost Creek Wilderness area Mountains to the east. Then in the distance a coyote lifts its muzzle to the new moon and yaps as though welcoming it for the night hunt. I go out on the deck and bark back in imitation. I frequently get an answer back from an entirely different direction. The first one answers; then me; then the third one chimes in; and we have a regular chorus going on. We laugh and wish the moment could be frozen in time, but we know it will occur again until too many people discover our retreat.

Then it is time for a campfire, marsh mellows and smores. We are fascinated by the dancing orange and yellow flames with an occasional burst of blue green from some mineral. A

stick in the hands of inexperienced grandchild comes out of the fire and starts waving around like a fourth of July sparkler; the child gets scolding number 39 and a marsh mellow gets slid onto the stick. Then peace settles in before a small whiff of wind. The smoke drift changes. Everyone leans in a different direction. Smoke stings the eyes but the marsh mellows are turning a golden brown. The anticipation heightens. A marsh mellow suddenly erupts into flame and the flame on the stick starts whirling around in the air again. Then it comes off and lands a distance away. Kids rush to stamp out the flame. Then we talk about the time a small piece landed on a certain daughter's cheek and burned it good. But now the marsh mellows are golden brown and starting to sag on the sticks. They are ready to melt the Hershey chocolate sandwiched between two Graham crackers. A delicious Smore appears in grandma's hands. Can you taste it?

The campfire has burned to a red glow of coals. Our attention is turned to the heavens and brightly distinguished constellations. We take turns naming them; everyone knows where to look for the big dipper, Big Bear or Ursa Major; sight along its outer lip pointed toward Polaris or the North Star; from the end of the handle you cross Draco the Dragon and there is Ursa Minor or Little Bear. Hey a star is moving. It can't be a star. Is it a jet? No it is not blinking and much too high. We have spotted the first satellite of the night. The challenge is on. Who can spot the next one first?

We huddle closer to the coals. We turn to warm our back sides. We turn back to warm our hands. Then we repeat it. We are procrastinating but we've had a day. We don't want this wonderful day to end. But it is as inevitable and we are reasonably assured that it will repeat tomorrow. Water is doused on the coals. They hiss as they gasp for life but quickly die out under a cloud of steam and smoke. The bright stars overhead light our way into the house and to bed. We look forward to rest and another ***warm summer day at Wildwood.***

Del Bills is a 28 year Wildwood resident; past Board President; retired electrical engineer; long time Boy Scout leader; a rural farming/ranching boyhood heritage; with an intense interest in nature. You can contact him at [www. delbertbills@msn.com](mailto:delbertbills@msn.com).

## The Nature of a Summer Day at Wildwood



Deck View of Wildwood Tranquility



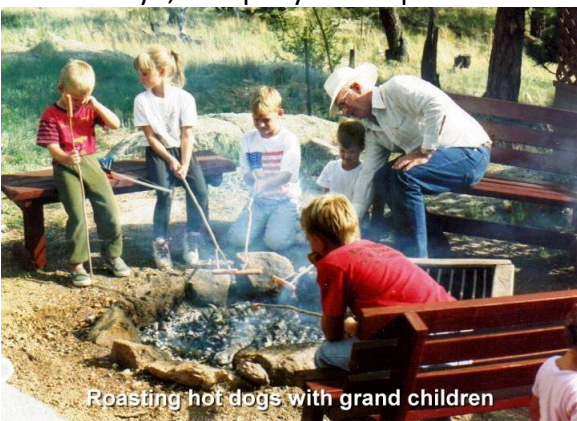
Blue Sky, & Golden Aspens, Olympic Circle



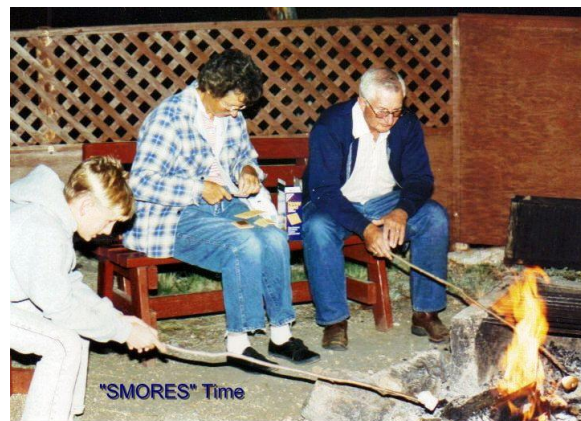
Del and Faye, Company & Camp Fire



Deck View of our Wildwood Sunsets



Enjoying Grandchildren and Campfire



Evening Campfire, SMORES and Stars