

An Experience of Natural Spirituality

Goldwin Emerson gandjemerson@rogers.com

London Free Press, September 27, 2014

On a beautiful September day my wife and I sat on a bench overlooking a large peaceful pond at Pond Mills Park. From a high promontory of land surrounded by tall trees we gazed out on the peaceful water below. It was so quiet and tranquil that we did not speak for a long time because neither of us wanted to break the spell of this quiet harmony that nature presented before us. But, from time to time nature herself punctuated the quiet calm with clear interruptions from the creatures of nature.

The longer we remained quiet the more we came to realize that there were, in fact, many small noises and actions that broke the apparent stillness of nature. Occasionally a fish would break the surface of the water and quickly return to swim off leaving small concentric ripples that spread across the lake below.

Then there was the quick repetitive *rah-ta-ta-tat* hammering of the woodpecker working on a tree trunk in search on his lunch. Although the woodpecker was out of sight, we judged it to be in a tree across the lake approximately two kilometres away. Yet the smoothness of the water seemed to carry the sound waves much clearer and closer than that.

Some tall trees swayed gently back and forth in the calm breeze. Other trees belonging to a poplar species had symmetrically pointed leaves that continuously rippled and rustled in gentle breezes which caused them to appear to move in wave-like motions.

Then there were the songs of birds. Some announcing their territorial boundaries, some calling to their mates, and others seemed to be singing just for the sheer joy of being alive in such a beautiful spot. Occasionally, one could hear the single call of a Canada goose protecting her nest and her tiny goslings.

Across the lake two young canoeists launched their red canoe into the water and glided off towards the centre of the lake. We heard the gentle swish of the sound

of their paddles, and we were pleased that no motor boats interrupted the muted sounds on the lake.

I tell this story because places like Pond Mills with its inviting natural scenery and its many human-made trails can enrich our lives. Some would even say that such scenes bring one to moments of secular spirituality rather than to supernatural religious spirituality, although, no doubt, this location may do that as well. It depends partly on what we as individuals bring to the scenery.

In terms of human endeavor, I am grateful to the men and women who find, and respect, and develop such locations as these. They create human-made boardwalks, viewing platforms, and regulations designed to protect nature and its beauty. Many of us seniors would never get to enjoy such places without their human sacrifice or their careful planning and their labour.

Then there are city politicians, and city planners, and conservation associations who offer their care, concern, and expertise in protecting natural beauty and making it possible for their fellow humans, both old and young to respect and admire nature. Without their foresight and planning, Pond Mills would likely by now be surrounded by cottages, houses, noisy motor boats and crowded beaches.

When we returned to our car and drove away from this haven of peace, within two kilometers we abruptly experienced a contrasting view as we merged into the hustle and bustle of cars, busses and other vehicular traffic along Commissioners Road and Wellington Street. At one point, we observed a fire engine and then some ambulances approaching and departing from Victoria Hospital. These noises and activity were also made by, and for, the convenience of our fellow humans. But the activity was unexpectedly abrupt and in contrast with the spiritual peace of Pond Mill's tranquility.