



Lights and Shadows from the Dishman Hills, September, 1998

THE MAKING OF A NATURALIST

The following article is the story of Tom Rogers, one of the founders of the Dishman Hills Association and still active in the organization. Tom has spent his entire life (84 years so far) fascinated with the wonders of nature, and has committed himself to the understanding, appreciation, and preservation of natural areas.

While other people may best remember their first monster movie or a special Christmas present, Tom's earliest recollections involve his encounters with nature. At four years old Tom was curious like all other children, and Columbia Falls, Montana had a lot to fascinate a kid. He had a little toy stove into which he imprisoned a handsome swallowtail butterfly, only to find later to his amazement a batch of eggs. In first grade a sky-blue mountain bluebird invaded the schoolroom to the delight of all the children.

Tom's interest expanded as he grew. Walking home from school he picked wildflowers on land that is now covered with lawns and paving. Across the dirt road from the farm spectacular skunk cabbage grew. Wild roses along the edge of the road were pink and red, scenting the air. Buttercups heralded the Spring, and a bouquet of them was offered for his mother's March birthday present. Now plants as well as animals became part of Tom's world.

Early on his family moved onto a farm, and started a dairy. Tom helped his father and brother milk the cows, and bottle and deliver the milk. Encounters with nature were a daily occurrence there, and birds began to become a part of his life; a bluebird pair nested in a hole on the telephone pole, wrens moved into his homemade birdhouse that he nailed to the side of his house, ruffed grouse drummed in the nearby woods, and Canada geese thrilled him with their honking each Spring as they winged their way north.

During Tom's formative years a number of people recognized and encouraged his interest in wild things. His mother encouraged him in his passion for nature. An old maid aunt who lived down the road in a log cabin encouraged the boy's interest and bought him a book on butterflies, rekindling his earliest childhood interest. Many an hour found the boy, net in hand, in the productive thistle patches, fields, and nearby forest. A young minister got teenage Tom interested in birdwatching and took him on many a trip. Now he could start adding names to more of the animals in his life; it was a Swainson's thrushes which nightly voiced their silvery ascending songs in the swamp across from his home, and it was a white-crowned sparrow that came down from the mountain to stop on the farm's bushes.

College landed Tom in Missoula at the University of Montana majoring in, of course, zoology. He brought his interest, and birdwatching remain a popular pastime. Moving on to Washington

State for a Master's degree provided him the opportunity to study the plants along the Columbia River, soon to be covered by a lake forming behind that new Grand Coulee Dam. On to Indiana University for a PHD in zoology, new places, new plants, and new animals. His education was to be interrupted by World War II.

(to be continued next month)

ORGANIZATION NEWS

We are a non-profit organization dedicated to saving natural areas in the Spokane region for public enjoyment and education. Call Michael Hamilton at 747-8147 with any questions. We will have our monthly meeting in October at Opportunity Elementary School, South 1109 Wilbur, the third Tuesday of the month at 6PM.

Donations to our Land Fund amounted to \$7920 in August. \$5,000 was from a generous person wishing to remain anonymous.

Our thanks to you who who donated and have given permission to be listed here: BDR Corp. (William Lentz), Signe Courier, Elizabeth DeNiro, Doris Distad, Robert Downing, Carol Ellis, John English, Stanley Fahlgren, Wilbert Fritz, S.R. Gerimonte, Claire E. Goudge, Larry Grossman, Pauline Hagan, Lunell Haught, Mary Jones, Carla Joyal, Gloria Krebs, Randy Knight, Camille Kovarik, Hans Krauss, Helen Liminger, John Lorang, Linda Martin, Kerry Masters, Leo Middendorf, Marilyn Miller, Trudy Miller, Margaret Mortz, Rick Nelson, Sheila Pachernegg, Elizabeth Parsons, Medeline Phelps, Constance Porter, Mrs. Joel Ream, Tom Rogers, Zenobia Rogers, Norma Rosenburg, Julie Rosenoff, Harold Skinner, Lois Smith, Kristin Stewart, Jan Strobeck, Dwight Vance, Edwin Weilep, Jeanne Wilson, and three anonymous donors. Obviously we are getting great support from you boosters of the Dishman Hills-Rocks of Sharon Project. **Many, many thanks!**

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