

Footloose

The Blue Canoe: a sure sign of Spring

Spring, my friend, is right around the bend.

I realize that seeing That in print This morning will cause a lot of folks to figure Papa is likewise, but let me tell you, I saw a sure sign of Spring yesterday.

It wasn't a flock of Canada geese breathing through their noses and heading North. It wasn't a herd of robins hip-deep below the feeder and pecking at the frozen birdbath. It wasn't even Steady Eddy taking off his longjohns for the year because Steady is still sleeping in his socks. Until June.

What I saw yesterday was The Blue Canoe.

Actually, what I saw was its bottom, its Outside. But as Steady has observed in all manner of Seasons: If the Outside is already among us, can the Inside be far behind?

All Winter long, The Blue Canoe lay high and dry and beached



**North Country
Notebook**

By George Vukelich

alongside the house. For almost that long, it lay hidden in the mountainous snowdrifts that made big dogs blanch and little dogs vanish.

Now, there it was, The Blue Canoe, broaching like a dolphin, its belly wet and glistening. Its body lean and beautiful. Up from the depths. Up on the surface.

I got myself a boiling cup of Voyageur Tea — Orange 'N Spice — started out the back door and just sort of hung out with the Blue Canoe for a spell. About where we had been before the snows came. About where we would go when the snows went.

"A man is part of his canoe," the immortal Sigurd Olson had written

once, "and therefore part of all it knows. The instant he dips a paddle, he flows. as it flows, the canoe yielding to the slightest touch, responsive to his every whim and thought. The paddle is an extension of his arm, as his arm is part of his body. Skiing down a good slope with the snow just right comes close to it, with the lightness of near-flight, the translating of even a whisper of a wish into swift action; there, too, is a sense of harmony and oneness with the earth. But to the canoeman there is nothing that compares with the joy he knows when a paddle is in his hand."

"That's pretty heady stuff," Steady warns, "when you're talking to catfishermen. Persons."

"Catfisherpersons?"

"Just because I wear army shoes," Steady argued, "it doesn't mean I'm not attuned to the nuances."

Ah, Sigurd, Sigurd. Who else could have written it:

There is magic in the feel of a paddle and the movement of a canoe, a magic compounded of distance, adventure, solitude and peace. The way of a canoe is the way of the wilderness and of a freedom almost forgotten. It is an antidote to insecurity, the open door to waterways of ages past and a way of life with profound and abiding satisfactions. When a man is part of his canoe, he is part of all that canoes have ever known.

There was dripping from the eaves and below it, a patch of open, muddy soil.

If this keeps up, I told Steady, we'll be able to see The Compost Pile emerging soon.

"Now," he said. "You're talking."