

# North Country Notebook

George Vukelich



*The following column appeared in the Madison Press Connection a year ago as an appreciation of my wife, Helen. The Press Connection isn't around anymore, which has taught me once again that if you just have to lose Something every now and again, better anything than her. Helen is still around, December 5 is still her birthday, and the folks who appreciate her could start their own country.*

"Ah," the poet asks, "what is so rare as a day in June?"

"Ah, indeed," Steady Eddy responds. "The answer to the question is: That very June day in the month of December."

Yesterday was that kind of day.

An "Indian Spring" day, Steady calls it, when you're tempted to watch the sky for geese going north, and the geese are almost tempted to go.

A sneaky kind of day, sunny and blue and so warm with little breezes that you

start expecting crocus on the southern slope.

A gift from God, this day.

Helen's birthday.

I brewed up a cup of Red Zinger tea and took it into the back yard, the back yard battened down for heavy weather.

Alongside the house, the Blue Canoe was beddy-bye, bottom-up and settled down for a long winter's nap.

Under the naked oaks, the Koenig feed was full to the gunwales with plump sunflower seeds designed to keep the wintering cardinals likewise.

The picnic table was swept clean, the only place-setting some stones from Sister Bay.

And yet, Winter wasn't today. Today was sleepy sunlight and sweet wind and Helen's birthday.

I remembered the summer day Helen had gathered up those beach stones at

Sister Bay. Vince had been right behind her picking up other stones on the short hop and making the long throw to first base out in the bay.

I remembered the early morning Vince came into this world—and his sisters before him.

I remembered the time when I thought marrying a minister's daughter, a Preacher's Kid, was a pretty straight, unrevolutionary thing to do. Later events, however, have proved that I've been hanging out with the most political person since Madame Defarge.

"Some persons," Steady Eddy points out, "tend to their knitting that way."

In a day and age when you can clock most marriages with an egg timer, it's a pleasure to recall that we've been married forever, and she says I'm still her friend.

It's also a pleasure to recall that she has taught me all there is to know about a relationship.

Number One: Marriage is Something you go through with Somebody.

Number Two: Home is the place, where; when you have to go there, they have to take you in.

She says Robert Frost said that first, but he said it for everybody.

On her birthday, you can't get her another Pete Seeger album, because she must have every one ever recorded.

You can't get her another friend, either, because everyone she meets becomes one.

Out here, in the Winter Springtime, I wish I could give her this day.

She would promptly share it with her friends, Steady says.

"Just give her all the days you got left," he advises. "Only save a couple for cat-fishing."

So be it.

Happy Birthday, Friend. •