

The Land Remembers—Wisconsin Classic

Once you have lived on the land, been a partner with its moods, secrets and seasons, you cannot leave. The living land remembers, touching you in unguarded moments, saying "I am here. You are part of me."

When this happens to me, I go home again, in mind or in person, back to a hilltop world in southwestern Wisconsin. This is the story of that farm and its people.
—from the book

The Wisconsin farm of which Ben Logan writes is nestled on a ridgetop in the Kickapoo country, nine miles east of the Mississippi River.

Its sprawling 260 acres of cultivated fields, woods and pastureland was home to the boy Ben Logan, his three older brothers and their parents.

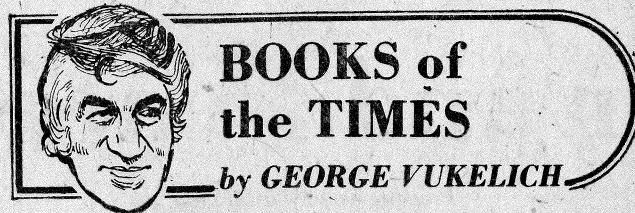
"There was someone else, to make seven of us," the author remembers. "Lyle Jackson came as a hired man the year I was born. He stayed on and became such a part of us that even the neighbors sometimes called him the oldest Logan boy."

It was Lyle who observed, when he first heard about the glaciers missing this Wisconsin hill country:

"That figures. Even the ice had sense enough to stay out of these hills. Now, wouldn't you think people would be as smart as ice?"

Coming from Norway in 1898, Father Logan (an immigration official added an "n" to Loga in order to "Americanize" the name) and his three brothers sought their fortune in the New World. Father Logan's first job here was grubbing stumps from newly cleared land.

"Young Norwegians," he would recall, "were cheaper than



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by *GEORGE VUKELICH*

The Land Remembers

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blasting powder in those days."

His father had run away from home at 15, gone to sea on an old windjammer and remained forever an exotic to young Ben.

His mother had been a schoolteacher — from her pictures, a slim, beautiful girl with great eyes and a young innocent look, in the company of young men, girlfriends, school children. He remembers her locked to that ridgeland, yet her books and college days had told her of wider worlds.

"I am sure she was often lonely," Logan writes, "though I doubt if Father ever knew. He had finished his wandering before he came ashore on that high ridge. She was still earthbound . . ."

But though his parents gave him life, it is always the land, the land that sustains him.

• "Father's calendar was the land itself. He walked out into the bare fields feeling the soil, testing it for moisture and

warmth, smelling it. When the soil said it was ready, then he was ready to begin. There was something wonderfully mysterious about Father's decisions. I walked with him sometimes, feeling and smelling the soil in imitation of him. There is still a certain feel and smell of warming land that says seedtime to me."

• "We prowled through a freshly cultivated cornfield in the northeast corner of the farm. Father said there must have been an Indian village there once because arrowheads and bits of pottery turned up behind the plow. Half hidden by the fast-growing corn, ignoring the crowing of roosters from the neighboring farm, we searched for the arrowheads and began to see teepees, smell the smoke of woodfires, hear the sounds of voices in a language we couldn't understand . . . What were they like? How did they die?"

When he is sixteen, his mother dies, and young Ben plants a garden in memory of her.

" . . . I planted the half row of mystery seeds next to the larkspur, then the zinnias, nasturtiums and cosmos . . . When it was all finished, I straightened up to uncrick my muscles, putting my head way back, looking up at all the different shades of blue. Then like Lyle, I started crying . . . Curled around the trunk the way I'd done when I was younger, with the branches of the big maple tree reaching out toward me, I let go and cried for the first time without trying to stop."

This is a beautiful, beautiful story. It is going to be a Wisconsin classic. As soon as you read it. Write me if I'm wrong.

Ben Logan — farmer, magazine editor, teacher, and screenwriter — is at present Producer of Broadcast Media for United Methodist Communications.