

# Some 'plain old words' for Christmas

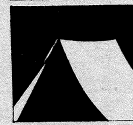
DEC 21 1978

Ed Miller, as Augie Derleth used to say of the old-timey pioneers, has Wisconsin in his bones.

Ed's a prof at the University of Wisconsin-Madison, but none of his friends hold that against him. Hells bells. A Renaissance man ought to be as comfortable with a canoe as he is with a computer. As smart around double-bitted axes as he is around the double helix. Wise enough to lecture, wise enough to listen.

Ed wrote something a few years back that I like to pull out in this season and read again. It's one of the nicest Christmas cards I ever got. And it's just a plain old piece of paper with some plain old words on it:

One of the pleasures of winter is the farmhouse in the Baraboo woods. It is a place apart, tucked away in a snowy vale; quiet, peaceful, a rest for the soul if not the muscles.



## North Country Notebook

By George Vukelich

Heat must be earned. Earned by scrounging dead branches; exercising the saw and axe; babying the stove. But the ruddy warmth of the kitchen after supper is like nothing that comes from a furnace in town. It gets to your shins, it warms your backside. After a dark trip into the night snow for more wood or "the call of nature," that kitchen is like a haven of protection.

I guess the nicest part is to step out into the dark when the snow is drifting in among the trees, first softening, then gradually erasing the tracks of the wild things that live in our woods. Wild creatures that have no warm kitchens to come back to in the blizzard. When the wind rattles the windows and moans

in the chimney, it does come home to me that those wild creatures are out there somewhere; the squirrels and coons sheltering in the hollow trees; the deer in the thickest wooded patches; the skunks in some smelly burrow; the grouse under a bushy, fallen evergreen; the mice multiplying their many tunnels under the snow.

I would not like to be caught out the night in the snow and without any fire.

The contrast with the happy stove, its coffee pot whispering at the back, is the contrast between the wild and the man.

But I often think that the man in the woods is the man at his best — the man closer to, and better

understanding, the wild from which long ago, he has himself descended.

Will there be a time when all men live in plastic cubicles — sheltered from all cold and heat — from even the sawyer's callouses? If men forget the wild and the land . . . the wind and the snow . . . the savour of warmth and the yellow windows of light in the blizzard, savoured because the cold is around and felt . . . if such a plastic time comes, I will not be there to know it, even if I could somehow live to be a thousand.

I could not live in such a world.

I pray none of us or any of our children's children will ever come down to such a world.

My bones are filled with rain and the sun, the wind and snow and the land.

Merry Christmas to you from Ed Miller's house.

And from ours, too.