

On defining wilderness

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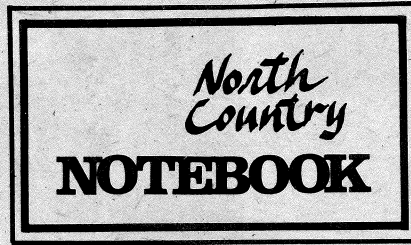
FROM THE MAIL BAG: A glimpse of The Old Days as Thomas J. Murn of Madison writes:

"I would like to comment on your column in The Press Connection of 22 Feb. . . .

"I think I can understand your feelings about not going back to the Albany River region and I can also sympathize somewhat with Aldo Leopold (or whoever) who said that piece about not returning to a wilderness once visited. But part of the problem is what one defines as wilderness.

"Almost every landscape from here to Baffin has been altered — or unaltered — as a result of the activities of humankind. Yet, I think, there are still many places which hold that sense of peace and restoration which a wilderness area can provide. Some corners of the Arboretum can still seem, at times, to give a wilderness effect — if you can overlook the IBM building over the trees.

"I guess what I'm getting at is



that perhaps 'wilderness' can coexist with 'civilization'. After all, the more people who enjoy a wilderness area, the more people who will be around to fight for preservation of that area in the face of pollution or commercial exploitation.

"Each year when I return to my favorite tamarack bog in Portage County, I discover more changes which the coming of civilization has brought.

"First, the town roads were paved, then they were named.

"Now, irrigation rigs scare away the wildlife and the water table is dropping.

"It saddens me but it's also an inspiration to hassle my assembly persons and senators to enact more protective laws.

"Just as an aside: your mention of

Holy Assumption in your column reminds me that you mentioned West Allis several times in the past.

"I wonder if you ever met my father when you lived in the 70th-Greenfield area.

"My grandfather worked at Kearney and Trecker when the family was on Greenfield and they were parishoners at Holy Assumption in the 1940's and 1950's where both my mother (Sylvia Petershack) and father went to school.

"Best of luck with The Connection . . ."

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Thomas, you don't know what a shock it is to encounter someone with ties to the old neighborhood even using the words "tamarack bog." In the olden times, we would have figured it was an English castle. An English actor or one of those sneaky Latin phrases the Seven Foot Nun was always slipping in to test our little minds.

Indeed, I met your father. He was a fierce-eyed, hard-jawed, quiet kid named Frank.

I remember that he lived a half-block down from Greenfield in a house that fronted on 68th Street but everybody used the alley entrance. I also remember that he owned the very first pair of figure skates any of us had ever seen. Pooling our street smarts and hard-won wisdom, the gang reached the logical conclusion that your father was wearing corrective shoes.

Your father was a little younger than a lot of us but he too sat on the stone steps on the alley side of Dorich's Tavern when we weren't playing kick-the-can or "stick" or some kind of ball . . . Frankie Pintarich who could throw a baseball through a brick wall. Louie Rukavina who could catch it and who was the first neighborhood kid ever to do a dumb thing like go to college. And the Mouradian kids who were the fastest runners around. They had to be because their old man chased them periodically with a butcher knife . . .

Remember me to your father. And your family. And your bog. Dobro.