

Good Cheer



By Nate Smelle

IN SPITE OF THE BLOOD,SWEAT and hours of sleep I have lost since the sap started flowing last month I felt good as I prepared for a late night/early morning sap run. It was just after 4 a.m. as I strolled out the door and into the dark woods. With more syrup than I could possibly consume in a decade in my cupboard I wondered how long it would take me to burn through this supply. As deliciously satisfying as the maples' nectar is, by the end of the process I came to value a far more precious gift from the forest than any one pancake could absorb. Walking into the forest behind my home a wave of sadness hit me as I realized this would be the last sap collecting hike of the season.

With the end of the sap season in sight I consciously began to savour every part of the process. From the sweet syrup to the soothing scents, sounds, and yes, even the smoke spewing from the secondhand woodstove I had pulled from the melting pile years earlier, it was all golden.

Skimming the bark and bugs from the top of the bucket of sap I had gathered I saw the shadow of a large bird pass over me. It was the first Great Blue Heron to make an appearance to me this season. ?What a place to be!? I mumbled to myself happily as I picked up the bucket and continued my collection.

Thinking of how many other wild beings I had crossed paths with since I first tapped the trees, I felt lucky in regards to how much time I had spent outside this Spring. Howling wolves calling to one another as the night disappears... Bald eagles, turkey vultures, woodpeckers, blue jays and American kestrels soaring overhead... Robins, ruffed grouse and American woodcock scurrying about the forest floor as Moose, Canadian Lynx, red fox and whitetail deer keep an eye on me from a distance. The bio-catalogue of species sharing the space where I live grew even further as I remembered the countless bees, flies and moths that I had discovered drinking from the sap buckets.

Inspired by both the quality and quantity of my observations of the wild ones returning to Detlor I picked up my two 20 litre buckets?now full?and headed back to stoke the fire and stir the pot. Halfway back I stopped to indulge in a bit of the sap to overcome my thirst and early morning breath. Enjoying the momentary refreshment my mind wandered back to a conversation I had with environmental activist Sabrina Bowman on the bus to the climate march in Quebec City last weekend. As the climate campaign organizer for the organization Environmental Defense who organized the buses from Toronto, Bowman cares deeply about the health of the planet and all of its inhabitants. During our discussion Bowman explained to me how instrumental her family's cottage in Barry's Bay has been in defining her as a professional activist and as a person. Providing her with the opportunity to escape the

concrete confines of the big city, the cottage experience has always encouraged her to appreciate the wildness in our region. It also has motivated her to dedicate her life to ensuring that this abundance of natural beauty exists for generations to come.

Sharing a similar appreciation for nature I thought about how my recent endeavour in syrup production has strengthened my personal convictions and desire to live in harmony with the natural world. Reading the label on that old bottle of table syrup in the fridge one soon discovers that this is not an easy task when you start paying attention to the ingredients in our food.

Nearing my destination the smoke trickling from the stove signified that the fire was almost out. Pouring the fresh sap into the already boiling pots I could see the day's first light peering over the treeline as I stoked the fire. Four sunrises in four days...not bad, I laughed to myself. It was time to celebrate, it was time for pancakes.

Happy Earth Day!