

The Landscape of 'I Am'

Judy Andrekson

April. A prairie landscape in full Spring magnificence and a human landscape just learning to Be.

My dog and I have wandered farther out into the country this weekend. Our winter stomping grounds, beautiful as they are, are not expansive enough for our high spirits on this day. Spring is calling us farther East, into reserve land far from the restraints of the city.

My mind remains in the city for the first while. It always does that. I argue with my husband as I drive toward our destination, even though he is still at home, warm in his bed. The glorious, golden light of early dawn delights and distracts my mind from its worries and cares, but only for only a moment or two. I fret about a child in my classroom as I park and Isa and I head onto the trail, plan my next move as we leave the trail for open fields. It will take me a while to relax enough to just listen without getting caught up, to just watch without buying in. The dramas all seem very real. But not for long. Without fail, the landscape surrounding me soon takes over, reminds me, finds me. Soon I will remember what I Am.

We walk for at least a half an hour this time before it hits. We stand on a hilltop, side by side, rolling meadows and poplar bluffs spreading in all directions, as far as the eye can see. Water drips from rotting snowdrifts and the dead, matted grass is soaked and fragrant. My feet, in my hiking boots, are dry, but my legs are wet to the knees. Isa shakes the water from her dense black coat and stares at me with eager, amber eyes.

I see it with my eyes and smile my pleasure at the beauty around me – it is so beautiful – but it hasn't found me yet. I feel caught up in the beauty, but I have not become beautiful too. I walk on, blissfully unaware, and my mind plays with scenes of an event two days old, recreating, reworking, adding new lines and clever come-backs that didn't come quickly enough at the time.

Suddenly, a noise catches my attention – a thumping – and I pause to listen more closely. In that moment of hesitation, I am found.

The thumping I heard was a quail's thumping, deep and clear, slow at first, then faster and faster. When I stopped and paid attention to this, a thousand other sounds came with it. Ducks wings whispering over my head, geese honking their greetings and warnings, robins, chickadees, sparrows, warblers – a thousand beautiful voices at once. The quail's thump resounding, a red-tailed hawk's scream, the ghost bird's eerie echo from somewhere high, beyond my vision. The breeze rustling the dead grass, the water sounds, the chirping of frogs, and so much more.

I hadn't been hearing any of it – only the thoughts in my mind. What a miracle to hear it now!

At the moment of becoming overwhelmingly aware of the remarkable soundscape, I am also suddenly, acutely, and delightfully aware of the air on my skin. The underlying coolness of the morning air, the gentle, swirling currents around my face as I move, the caress of warmth as the sun begins to penetrate the morning chill. I hold still and turn my face to that warmth and I Am that warmth.

And in that same moment, I look again into the intense, eager eyes of Isa, and I am that eagerness. There is no separation between us. The landscape of 'me' melts into the landscape around us and becomes the landscape of all things. I Am the hawk as it screams overhead and the tiny mouse that suddenly scurries through the matted grass. The tears of joy that are suddenly on my cheeks is the water that trickles down the thawing slopes. I Am the mist as it begins to rise and swirl over the little pools and ponds that dot the meadow. I Am a part of the landscape, without separation, without beginning or end.

It is so good to be found, reminded of the Life that connects everything as one and always has, and to have the feeling, once more, of coming home. For a few brief moments, I am suspended in that knowing and understanding, and I am reluctant to move for fear of forgetting.

But I won't forget. At least, not for long. Sometimes, in the middle of my busy week, I might forget for a while, but little things bring the meadow back to me – Isa's eyes, the sparrow at my bird feeder, a moment of laughter with a friend, a hug from my daughter, a smile from my husband. My mind will get busy and try to convince me that I am just a little, faulty person, but I'll know better.

I Am Life, connected to all other forms of Life in an unending rhythmic heartbeat. In the midst of the city, surrounded by people, or in the isolated meadow or forest trail where I feel the connection most intensely, I Am.

I can be nothing else.

I am a Canadian writer (True Horse Stories series published by Tundra Books, feature articles in several magazines including Canadian Gardening, HorseCanada - 3x, etc), an explorer of nature and Life and my connection to it, an Educational Assistant, a mother and many other things.
