

March 2, 2024

Two Miles From Home



For thirty-five years I lived in Hyde Park, Vermont. Seventeen of those years I owned a gift shop in the neighboring town 2 miles door to door. There were several routes I could take from home to store but I tended to choose, more times than not, to go by the Lamoille River where it spread out and appeared as a lake. My lake. My lake to observe each day on my short commute. One morning I might see the sunrise, if I was up early. Another day, heavy clouds. Or thick mist

which invariably obscured the distant view of Elmore Mountain. Occasionally, I would see ducks either on their seasonal commute or mid-summer simply using the water as a rendezvous point.

After a downpour the lake would swell and rise, covering up the short-stemmed plant growth. A few days later the water would recede. During dry periods the already shallow “lake” would become a mud flat far out into the deeper parts of the river. In winter the vast fields of white offered its own beauty in between freeze and thaw to open water.

As you can imagine this scene was much photographed by me. I never got tired of its simple loveliness. I would anticipate, as I drove up the slight rise before the water came in view, what delights I would see that day. Even if it was flat light it would merely be gray beauty.



Many years hence I made Westford, Vermont my new home having gotten married to a man from that town. There is a river running through this town also, but a not-too-wide, traditional meandering river mostly hidden from public view. What my new hometown offered were a variety of old barns all within two miles in either direction that I tended to travel when leaving our dead-end dirt road. I would always check to see how the day had landed on them: dramatic light, dull light and everything in between.

In both towns the light never failed to command my attention causing me to compose the scene in my mind's eye and often demanding I slow down, roll down the window, or get out of the car for better vantage point with which to take a photo. As with Lake Lamoille, I found myself using these old barns and homesteads as a bellwether for the day. It was a conscious decision to repeatedly photograph these familiar places as well as a plethora of other details of the natural world all within a mile or two from home. What may seem mundane to someone else was a treasure trove of creative simplicity.

I love distant lands, but I was finding infinite variety close to home, including in the woods around our home: literally out our back door and to the trailhead that our road morphs into. The woods became a new tell for me showing me the mood of the day. But this tell never deceived even if shrouded in mystery. Each day as I emerged from the woods, I would seek out the open land with its old barns, mostly retired now, with child-like readiness for the unseen to become visible.

