

## Life in Minnesota 5

Well, I can hardly believe it. Fall has come and you can't imagine how beautiful it is. Lots of yellows, ambers and deep reds, mixed in with whatever green is left. The landscape is positively breathtaking.

The seasons seem to have moved forward at a break neck pace. I barely enjoyed spring and summer, and now it is fall already? One year has passed, which is a stunning realization to me, because that's when we came here to house-hunt. Anyway, I realize as I write this, that it has been over 10 weeks since I wrote last and so much has happened that I don't know where to begin.

Summer, as you no doubt have heard, gave us some sizzling temperatures, which one day got up to 104° Thank God for air conditioning! Adding humidity to the stifling hot air, one had to become judicious about what and how many trips to make to run errands. The moment you got into the house again, the igloo effect was a welcome relief. I don't do well with heat like this. I think if I had my 'druthers,' I'd rather be cold than hot; at least you can do something about it, like adding layers of clothing. Of course, we won't talk about the hot flashes that come with age. You gentlemen have no idea! On second thought, being on the receiving end of your spouse's discomfort --maybe you do.

Summertime really highlights country living in Minnesota --lots of festivals, fairs, homemade jellies and jams, pie contests, and elections of young aspiring queens and princesses with their respective courts, all decked out in sparkling tiaras. We are talking HUGE towering tiaras --the kind a Miss Universe would wear. Every township ran a pageant with their country fairs. You know something? I can't even think of where in California you could find tiaras like that. But here in Minnesota, it is serious social capital on the countryside stock exchange.

They have numerous lake activities and boat races too, which are described as "Aquatennials." One particular entry that is an inventive and hilarious standout is called the "Moolon Rouge," which is made out of milk cartons. The concept of building a boat the size of a battleship out of milk cartons was started by a group of Desert Storm Special Forces guys and continues to this day as a Special Forces military manned activity by the marines. If you can imagine it --these macho, bad asses (excuse my French) trying to survive afloat on a boat to get to the other side of the lake, is just too hysterically funny for words. Never say Minnesotans don't have a wicked sense of humor.

High Holidays' rehearsals began in August. I had 31 pieces of repertoire to get under my belt in 5 weeks and added to that, Adath Jeshurun asked me to perform the solo/cantoring works I did at our old temple. Additionally, not to be undone, I ended up being soprano section leader as well. Nothing like a little pressure on the synapses to stimulate the learning curve.

Their choir welcomed me with open arms, really nice good people. I was a 'God-send' one person told me, because the lead soprano who had been with them for years, never showed up, called, or answered numerous phone calls and emails. It was weird. But for them, however, my coming when I did was a *bashert* moment. I did 2 services each, back-to-back for Rosh Hashana, Kol Nidre and Yom Kippur. It was grueling hard work, (maybe I'm getting too old for this?) but in a strange way, it was also spiritually uplifting. Yesterday, I received a lovely note from the cantor,

*I was so pleased to have you in the choir for the holidays. You sang beautifully and added so much to our holiday services with your beautiful voice and your wonderful presence. I hope you will be with us for many years to come.*

I think we've found a temple home.

Now that it is fall, my other choir started up rehearsals and performing Sunday services, live on radio and TV. We're starting to dust off parts of Handel's *Messiah* already for Christmas and I may do some solo work...Yikes!! So, I commute twice a week to rehearsals. It's about 40 miles one-way for each venue and I think to myself, "Will I be able to do all this driving 20 years from now, just for a little bit of culture –culture meaning the music part?"

Speaking of culture, How and I do a lot of excursions into the metropolitan area to get out of Howard Lake. Try to imagine Howard Lake as the 'Mason Dixon Line.' Once we're off country roads and onto a freeway, which begins in the town called Wayzata, you're practically in 'La-La' land. It's like living in a perverse parallel universe –do you drape yourself in silks and satin, or do you wear gingham (not to be negative)?

And the amazing thing is that there are SO many activities to choose from. Do we go to museums (we saw the BodyWorlds exhibit), the opera, dinner theatre (which they have a great number of) a symphony or choral performance (also too numerous to count)? How about antique shop hopping, browsing bookstores or taking a garden tour?

Minnesota loves to grow things. Next to sports, gardening is a lifetime passion. People here have a remarkable knowledge of trees and flowers. I can't tell you how many times I've asked someone, "What is that called," or "What's the name of this tree," and invariably they knew the answer, noting both its familiar name and genus. It made me think to myself, "Gheez, I better bone up on trees and plants." I don't think blithe ignorance about it will be tolerated much longer.

Howard and I went to the Minnesota Landscape Arboretum. It showcases over 900 acres of gardens developed specifically for harsh northern climate. There are walk-thru areas of groundcover, shrubs, hedges, trees and various grasses of the prairie. We spent an entire day going through everything, including a Japanese and rose garden. Rose aficionados have to bend (ever so slightly) the trunk and stems of rose trees and bury it in the ground before snow comes. This particular garden had over 150 hybrid varieties, including those surrounding trellis', arbors and gazebos. Can you imagine having to bend and bury all those trees?

And sports? Oh my God, do not walk around not knowing who the Vikings (football) are, or the Twins (baseball) and the Timberwolves (basketball). Sports is a fundamentalist religion in Minnesota, I kid you not. Like polar opposites, i.e., sports and the arts, you are either with 'Joe six-pack' or Pinot Noir Cary Grant and if you're a Minnesotan, you're both.

Now about How. He's great! He loves his job and he's fascinated with some of the medical products he's working on. He's like a kid in a candy store with so many interesting things to chew on, like a switch component that goes into 5 sub-products of a defibrillator; a circuit that goes into a hearing aid microphone; and an externally worn insulin pump. What's more interesting to him is the product development process for medical devices. It is a world apart from the world of computers –rules and procedures that if not followed properly, can affect someone's life. Conceptually, it's a zoom lens reducing down to a micron, which is a millionth of a meter, and maybe smaller yet. Very exciting stuff!

The weekend before High Holidays, we went up to see the Booths to bask in paradise and "follow our bliss" as Joseph Campbell used to say. I don't know what it is, but it's so much more tranquil being in a beach front cabin on Lake Kabekona than viewing our own lake from my kitchen bay window. As always, the Booths planned a couple of excursions –one to their eldest daughter's restaurant, which she owns and runs with her husband, and the other was a hike in the woods to visit a friend who lives close by, the world-renowned textile artist Priscilla Sage.

Priscilla took us through her magnificent home in the woods, which she has turned into an open art gallery. It was like walking through an art museum. What a rush it is to meet someone like her and relish the nooks and crannies of her art studio. She had this funky old Singer's sewing machine that my grandmother used to have and all this work that she has hanging throughout her

home, galleries and museums around the world, came right out of that old sewing machine. Anyway, we became fast friends. She's as fascinated with my work as I am with hers.

Another development for those of you who don't know already, I am now a columnist for the Herald Journal, which is a local newspaper. The column is called "Musings of a Transplant," in which I give my impressions of transplanting to a different environment from California. I've published 4 already and I'm working on the 5<sup>th</sup>. They appear every 3-4 weeks, and I can set my own pace as to how often I write. I tell them the date I want it to appear and then they print it accordingly. Bill Booth encouraged me to do this because of these tomes called "Life in Minnesota" I've been writing to everyone. He thought locals might find it interesting to hear from an outside perspective, what living in Minnesota is like that they might otherwise take for granted and not appreciate. So far, it's been well received.

I'm getting a crook in my neck from all this keyboarding, which makes me think of a new mantra my St. Olaf choir is using for this performance season, one of those positive thinking exercises, you know? Anyway, it is simply, "Let us free the neck." What, you might ask, is that all about? Well, before rehearsals begin, common practice is to loosen up the body with stretch exercises, focusing around the chest, neck, shoulders and arms.

The neck, as we all know, is the gathering place for all of the day's tension and stress, so we try to loosen it up and release the tightness. It's a physical and mental exercise. But here's the thing...half of the choir chants the mantra, while the other half answers. Guess what that is?

**"You betcha"!!**

And you now know you're in Minnesota.

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