Augustana College  
Chapel of Reconciliation  
Janet Blank-Libra  

Sven Froiland and the Trees  

11 Oct 2010

On the way into the Humanities Building about a week ago, I encountered my friends and colleagues John and Heather Bart, who asked me about this stop—this grove—on the pilgrimage we are taking into the heart of Augustana. Why, they asked, the crabapple trees? Now, I confess, the romantic in me chose these trees. Each spring beauty spills forth from this space; blossoms reflect the sun’s might; the scent of spring interrupts routine and redirects our attention.

John and Heather, however, sorted out the romantic in me, and that is all to the good for sentimental romanticism never gets one far in the real world. At their previous home the Barts had known many crabapple trees. Yes, the trees had been resplendent with blossoms in the spring. But in the fall? Each year, John and Heather had shoveled their way free of the fermenting fruit on their lawn, slipping and sliding their way toward dry land. And then, they said, there were the flies. I think I needn’t say more.

Because this grove of trees reminds us not only of the potential for beauty but also of the labor that is life, this grove is a gift. We owe the gift of this grove, it seems, in part to Dr. Sven Froiland, whose life became a part of Augustana’s future when he came here in the fall of 1946, after serving in WWII.

Dr. Arlen Viste says that if memory serves him right—and memory generally serves Arlen right—Dr. Froiland, who was professor of biology, chair of the natural sciences division, and faculty “manager” of the Gilbert Science Center construction, saw to it that the building of GSC would not mean the demise of the trees. Through these efforts he honored the work of two brothers, Harold and Perry Devick. Steve Thomas, artist and knowledgeable man, says the Devick brothers worked at their family nursery a few miles north of Colton and began planting trees in about 1928 as a gift to Augustana. Perry was a 1928 graduate; he and his wife Shirley gave birth to three children, two of whom became Augie students, at least one of whom—Mickey—was a graduate. According to Steve, Perry and Harold “stayed at the task of planting at Augie for a number of years. Many of the old spruce, cottonwoods and elms were their doing.” Were these specific trees among those planted by the Devicks? I’ve not found the answer to that.

Dr. Froiland, it seems to me, saw himself as a part of his environment, not as separate from it. Even as he imagined a building that would nurture scientific minds, he gave all due care to the natural world that would surround the natural science building for decades to come. His determination has seen these trees through to the 21st century. Arlen says Dr. Froiland had a “deep concern for nature and for the environment, long before
environmental concerns became a fairly mainstream cultural concern.” His passion also took root in a book he published—the Natural History of the Black Hills—first published in 1978 by the Center for Western Studies.

His visions were many: he wished for Augustana’s natural sciences to be strong—a division of depth and quality, as Arlen says—and during his years here he expanded on the foundation that had been laid in the years prior to his arrival. His vision knows its deep roots today within the faculty in the natural sciences: a sturdy lot who need only walk out their side door to encounter the spirit of their benefactor. The rest of us need walk only slightly further to accept and honor what is our inheritance as well: a grove of trees that reflects the labor necessary, the beauty essential for one to realize a life well and deeply lived. These trees should remind us of those who came before us and imagined the future within which we stand now. To them we owe a debt: it is perhaps best paid in attentiveness and gratitude.

I was the child of farmers, and the home of my youth was lined on two sides by shelter belts. Into these cottonwoods and elms and willows and boxelders I wandered nearly every day of my childhood. They promised something I find hard to name. Mysteries to be known? Secrets to be fathomed? Refuge from my rather large family? They moved me from sunlight to shadows in the space of a few steps, often before one heartbeat could give way to the next. Time stood motionless in their midst, held in place by the branches that wove a web of connections above me. They were home.

If systematically observed and studied, trees teach us of the science, of the miraculous nature that is life; if understood as a part of who and what we are they deliver us into the spirit of being. When we stand in the quiet of such trees, the heart softens, the distance between human being and place diminishes, and we make possible the internalizing of their deeply-rooted wisdom. They take us so easily and so quickly into the presence and grace of God. Here, we can know the expansion of our consciousness through the act of becoming conscious. These trees, all trees, this grove can reconfigure time, make room for long moments into which we are free to step.

As I chatted with Heather and John the other day, I was struck by something John said. The crabapple trees, he said—and this despite their fall bounty—were “gorgeous” each spring. Theirs was a beauty that “would seem to happen overnight.” We know that gifts come with the passage of time, the turning of the seasons. We know this even as we know that time is marked and measured in moments, the ones we seize, the ones we pass by.

To Sven Froiland we can be grateful. To the Devick brothers we can give thanks. To the person who planted these trees we should feel beholden. If we simply step into the midst of these trees on occasion, they will create for us a moment for remembering what should not be forgotten. Theirs is a persistent power—and we should yield to their authority.
WALKING WORSHIP
Monday, October 11, 2010

Siyahamba

Siyahamba kukhenyeni kwenkhos’ (4x)
Siyahamba, Hamba, Siyahamba Ohhh
Siyahamba kukhenyeni kwenkhos’ (2x)

We are walking in the light of God (4x)
We are walking, walking, We are walking Ohhh
We are walking in the light of God (2x)

Caminamos en la luz de Dios (4x)
Caminamos, vamos, caminamos, vamos,
Caminamos en la luz de Dios (2x)

Morning Has Broken

CAMPUS MINISTRY ANNOUNCEMENTS

SERVICE TRIP (Fall Break) - Campus ministry is offering a service learning trip to Pine Ridge over Fall Break, Oct. 22-25. Cost is approximately $100; registration with $50 deposit is due in the chapel office is due by October 11th. There is also a survey of j-term and spring break possibilities in the narthex. . .let us know your preferences.

BANQUET – Campus Ministry is serving the Banquet, the local downtown soup kitchen, on Fri., Oct. 15th. There is a sign-up sheet on the Narthex table. The food prep shift is from 2-4 pm, and the serving shift starts at 5:15 pm. We will be doing some car pooling if you need a ride to the Banquet, which is on 8th St. and Weber Ave.

WORSHIP AT THE PRISON - Campus Ministry is visiting the SD State Penitentiary to share worship with the inmates on Wed., Nov. 10th. There are two clearance forms that can be obtained in Carol’s office and must be returned to the chapel office before Fall Break. This is an amazing, unique worship opportunity that we hope you will take advantage of

OUTREACH – Groups of students lead worship and youth retreats across the region. A great way to get acquainted with a smaller group of students of all ages with a modest time commitment. Applications on the table in the chapel Narthex. Sign up soon!!!

CHAPEL SCHEDULE

Sunday (10th) Homecoming Worship, 10:30 - Elmen Center
Monday (11th) Walking Worship, 10 am - Janet Blank-Libra
Tuesday (12th) Koinonia, 10 am (pre-sem group)
Wednesday (13th) Holy Communion, 10 am - Kirsten Mebust, Reli.
Friday (15th) Worship, 10 am - Jon Ask, Sr. Spkr.
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