**Showcasing the DNR: Train my understanding**

*“Well, the big train keeps on rolling, rolling on down the track, and the way she’s moving buddy, I don’t believe she’s ever coming back,”* – Bob Seger

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The afternoon was wearing on slowly, in grand fashion, as though it were a day in June with the entirety of summertime waiting in the wings – like a butterfly set to unfold and emerge from its chrysalis.

The air was delightfully warm and was served up in intermittent breezes that whispered through the trees and pushed up over the surface of the lake.

Sunshine was bathing just about everything, except when an occasional puff of a cumulus cloud floated past slowly, temporarily blocking the sunlight.

It was truly a hammock-napping, baseball-game-listening, lemonade-sipping, sunglasses-wearing, please-don’t-ask-me-to-do-anything, glorious, summer afternoon.

The surprising thing to me in all of this was that this wasn’t June or July, this was very late August – like five scant weeks until the peak of fall color in late September.

This all brought to my recollection another rare day, just like this, when I was a teenager. I had bought a bag of these new corn chip, nacho cheese things called “Tostitos” and an ice-cold can of diet Pepsi.

I climbed up into the lower branches of a big maple tree that hung over our backyard and sat up there for at least an hour, crunching and sipping, just enjoying the warmth of the day and the rarified air that for some reason occurs only up amid the branches of trees while limb-sitting or lounging inside the cozy confines of a treehouse.

It was a dreamy day, undoubtedly memorable for its warmth and the want to do not much of anything – what is often referred to as a “lazy, summer day.”

I often have wondered whether that term means that the day itself is lazy or is it that the person experiencing such a time is lazy? I have concluded that it is likely both.

I can see how a day would occasionally need a day to slow down and roll past in a drawn out, languid expression of itself. Kind of like a reflection of the activity it sees happening on the earth below.

On warm and arid summer days, people, animals and even plants tend to all slow down, wilt a bit and droop toward the shade found beneath the sprawling branches of trees to rest and relaxingly let the hours tick by.

If a day decided to do the same, to slow down and rest itself for minutes or hours undisturbed, would any of us – caught up in or own repose and contentment – even notice? Doubtful.

On this beautiful late August day, I sat in a chair in the backyard eating chunky chocolate ice cream from a waffle cone. I wanted to stretch these moments out as out for as long as I could.

Just being alive on a day like today was fulfilling. It was enough. It was all I needed.

The only things I really noticed moving besides those clouds overhead, were a pair of hummingbirds that were darting back and forth at each other around our hummingbird feeders and a couple of yellowjackets that were suspended in the air near the end of one of the hollow and cylindrical, metal crossbars on one of the clothesline poles.

Watching the activity of the hummingbirds was making me sleepy. They seemed to be consuming way too much energy, moving too quickly, for the moment.

The yellowjackets disappeared inside the hollow of the pole. I stood up on the tips of my toes and looked inside. I saw a bunch of yellowjackets crawling around on top of a nest.

I walked down to the other end of the line and checked the hollow in that crosspiece. There was another nest and more yellow jackets inside. I then moved to the other side of the cross bar and checked there.

Nothing in one of the holes, and in the last one there was a nest from a previous nesting season. It was all gray-colored and shriveled up. No yellowjackets there.

I know a lot of folks would have already saturated the yellowjackets and their nesting structures with poison. I couldn’t see doing that.

These creatures have been here all summer long, and I didn’t even know it until just now. They had also been going about their business as we’ve gone about ours, and no one was stung or even bothered once.

I didn’t see any reason to kill them.

So, I didn’t.

For me, it always feels better to build, rather than destroy.

Of course, that doesn’t mean everything I’ve tried to build was a success. Many times, I’ve tried, with more energy than I knew I had, to build something and it still ended up crumbling apart.

I’m sure everyone’s experienced some of that.

It helps us learn how to better conceive of new plans and work even harder for success. It’s kind of interesting how past mistakes and faltering can lead to improved, refined and best-realized concepts in the end.

The grass in the yard went to seed a few weeks ago already, while black-eyed Susans and other wildflowers are still blooming around the yard. The flashes of deep blues, pinks, yellows and golds are beautiful to see.

With the calendar turning over to September, I am again astonished at the quick pace of the passage of time. Months now seem to last as long as weeks, and weeks are gone in what seems to be a couple days.

There was a fine crop of raspberries around the yard this summer. The plump, red berries have fed mostly the chipmunks and a few birds. I have eaten some too, on my little, almost daily walks around the yard.

Several deer have been coming to the apple trees in the backyard. The adults – a spike-horned buck and at least two does – stand on their hind legs to reach the greenish-yellow and pink-red apples.

The fawns born earlier this year wait for apples that have dropped from the trees since their last visit. I have gone out there on a couple of occasions and have shaken the apple tree, dropping many apples to the ground.

By the next morning, they have all disappeared.

If I step out into the darkness that lies beyond the back door at night, I can usually make out the shape of at least one deer out there near the trees. Sometimes I don’t see anything, but I can hear the wet, crunching and munching sounds.

The loons continue to offer their beautiful, haunting songs across more than a mile of open water every night. They sing during the daytime too, but the songs in the dead of night carry the best, and that’s when there are far fewer distracting sounds in the way.

A barred owl joined them a couple nights back, singing from one of the islands out in the lake. I called back and forth for a while with the barred owl.

Sandhill cranes have started to bunch up in their premigration groups, and the woods roads are filled with dozens of flickers, crossing back and forth as I drive down the dirt passage routes to the heavenly haunts I’ve known almost forever.

With the blush on the apples and these other signs, the calendar will soon bring autumn front and center before us again. It really doesn’t seem possible already.

I find myself saying that a lot. It sometimes feels like I am living in some type of suspended reality, where time, events and circumstances can slip forward in breakneck speed, and I stand still.

I feel like a ghostly passenger waiting for my train to come. Every engine that pulls into the station bears a number that isn’t mine. The conductor smiles and tips his hat as the cars roll slowly over the steel rails.

I move back up the concrete steps to find a bench to sit on to wait.

A mother walks out the doors of the station with her baby wrapped in a blanket in her arms. She boards the train that just rolled in.

The child’s father walks out nervously, smoking a cigarette. Dressed in suit and tie, he follows his wife up the steel steps. In a moment or two, they’re all gone.

I’m here waiting for the next train, while I can see life’s pageant moving past in the countryside beyond the tracks and in the streets of the little mining town around me.

I don’t think I can cross the tracks. I don’t think it’s allowed.

No matter.

I think my train will be here soon.

I’ll get on board, walk to the middle of the car and look for a window seat.

I might even order a cocktail and a broiled piece of salmon.

I want to see all I can as this bullet train smokes into oblivion.

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