

## **Emergence of an Ecological Vocation**

by Lorenzo Rosebaugh, OMI

It was a bright and sunny, cold Winter day. My mom had wrapped up my brother Phil and I in our warm Winter clothing. Wool hats and mittens and scarves knitted by my Grandma Rosenbaugh. The three of us had walked to Esterbrook Park in Milwaukee, Wisconsin pulling our toboggan behind us. Phil and I were about 7 and 6 years old respectively. My mom was a real trooper. She loved the outdoors, especially the Fall and Winter months. My dad worked for the Hartford Insurance Co. at the time and was working that day, or he too would have surely been with us.

The three of us must have been going down the toboggan slide and climbing back up the steep hill for well over an hour. When my mom noticed that Phil and I had begun shivering and our cheeks became overly red, she knew it was time to begin heading home. She then decided to take a short cut by way of walking along the train tracks. (A good idea on first thought, but not such a good idea after the fact.)

The three of us walked briskly along the tracks unaware of any imminent danger: my mom with her ear muffs on and Phil and I with our earflaps pulled down over our ears. The Milwaukee 400, I believe it was called, running between Milwaukee and Chicago, was making its way around the curve just behind us. The train conductor on seeing us in his path blasted his whistle. At the last second my mom turned, saw the train bearing down on us, swept my brother and I off our feet, while jumping down the snow bank, the three of us rolling over and over until finally coming to a stop.

I don't remember more details about that climactic episode, though I imagine that my mom had a sleepless night dreaming of what could have happened had she not heard the whistle of the train behind us. Surely my mom learned from that experience, but it didn't dampen my folk's strong desires of bringing their two sons into contact with the outdoors and the beauty of Nature every chance they had to do so.

In Milwaukee our home was within walking distance of Lake Michigan, that great body of water. There too, we spent time; our entire family walking along its beaches skipping rocks across the surface of the water, watching seagulls as they sailed above the water snatching small fish in their beaks and flying off. Phil and I took all of this for granted: this frolicking by the water, this engagement with nature since all this was part and parcel of the way of life of mom and dad. The surroundings near the beach and up the shoreline of Lake Michigan were magnificent. And in the Winter time I can still visualize my brother and I rolling down the steep hillside in the snow- just for

the joy of it- with mom and dad right beside us being as silly and mischievous as us kids. (Nature in all it's seasons, if I would only realize this, has the capacity of becoming one with us and invites to become one with it. Squirrels, acorns, falling leaves, the multiple colors of Spring and Autumn somehow breathe their spirit and beauty in and through us; and somehow, at a very early age, this was happening to both Phil and I.)

When I was ten years old or so my dad was transferred from Milwaukee to St. Louis. Those cold Winters which extended for months in Milwaukee would last only for a few weeks in St. Louis. Gone were the skating rinks my dad would provide for us in the vacant lots outside the houses we lived in while in Milwaukee. Dad could flood the area with the water from the hose during the day and the next morning we would have our own home made skating rink. It hardly worked that way after moving south to St. Louis. It just didn't stay cold long enough for the pond to stay frozen for an extended period of time. But, that was okay too. Other activities began to occupy my time. Sports, with the encouragement of my dad, in a certain sense, became everything for me. I dreamed, like other kids, of someday being a Cardinal baseball player.

When I look back on those days what I see as the real reason for sports being so all-important to me, (be it baseball, soccer or basketball) was that they were all fun, outdoors in nature, and with friends my own age. Now my family, in a certain way, extended to the ball diamond, the basketball court, the soccer field. The coaches of these teams, like my own dad, became fathers, friends, companions to me, all loving being with us kids, seeing us grow both physically and spiritually as young adults.

Sports demanded energy. Exerting energy kept us healthy, and good physical health was also good for the mind. I see in all of this that my mom and dad instilled within Phil and I at an early age, a love for the outdoors and the marvels of nature. This love seemed to remain in me through the various sports I played. The love of running through mud puddles in the freezing rain during an afternoon soccer game or practicing baseball with my dad day after day in the cool breeze of a summer evening. There was an excitement of life for me in all of this.

What my mom and dad breathed into Phil and I from birth on would remain for a lifetime as part of who we are. I have been an Oblate missionary and priest for over forty some years, but the energy and enthusiasm and love for life, for nature, all inherited from our loving mom and dad remains implanted in me till this day. As a missionary, I have hitchhiked from St. Louis, Missouri to Recife, Brazil; biked from El Salvador to the border of the U.S.; spent month upon

month in solitary confinement in U.S. prisons for acts of civil disobedience such as saying "no" to the war in Vietnam, nuclear weapons, the School of the Americas. I survived prison because of Providence. For example, high above me in each cell there would be an open window which allowed me to see the blue sky, hear the children's voices in the distance, and imagine those Autumn days near Lake Michigan, frolicking in the leaves on the hillside with my brother Phil.

It is now November, 2004, as I sit here in my small room typing these words on my laptop. It's windy and turning colder each day outside. Piles of leaves sit on the lower roof outside my window - a beautiful sight. The Mississippi River is also in sight from here if I just look a little bit to the right and down the hill.

I am 69 years of age going on seventy. For almost four years now, I have been here at our Oblate Novitiate and Ecological Initiative in Godfrey, Illinois writing my memoirs and compiling my lifetime of memories. An overwhelming experience this has been. I mean, an OVERWHELMING experience. Except for this time set apart, most of my life has been on the run - never taking the time to put it altogether. But now, during these last few years, I have. Before, I took so much for granted: beauty, nature, the love of my mom and dad, family and friends. I have now had the time to reflect and give thanks and praise for all of this.

I am able now to look out my window and see that somehow many things in my life are so much clearer than before. Perhaps, it is because life has slowed down for me in many ways. Walking consciously through our beautiful woods here overlooking the Mississippi, hearing the owl, seeing the woodpecker, feeling the rain on my face I now do so in the 'present', aware and conscious, and thankful all at the same time, same moment, in the same breath. My whole being, more so than ever before, cries out to be heard, yearns to be received and to share this infinite beauty, wealth and worth of Creation pouring into me from all sides. Do not harm, do not exploit, or bargain or destroy. What my mom and dad breathed in Phil and I so many years ago, now is my gift and responsibility to give and share with whomever has 'ears to hear and eyes to see.'