

A ruffed grouse settles in the snow beneath a balsam fir.



GREGORY K. SCOTT

A great walk in the unspoiled woods

A BOY AND HIS BEST FRIEND RUFFLE A RUFFED GROUSE ON A NEW SNOW MORNING.

Michael D. Louis

The day began like many other winter days in Stevens Point. It was soft, and motionless, as if waiting on something. Snow had fallen in the night creating a fresh thick white blanket.



Snow covered woods are even more beautiful when shared with a friend.

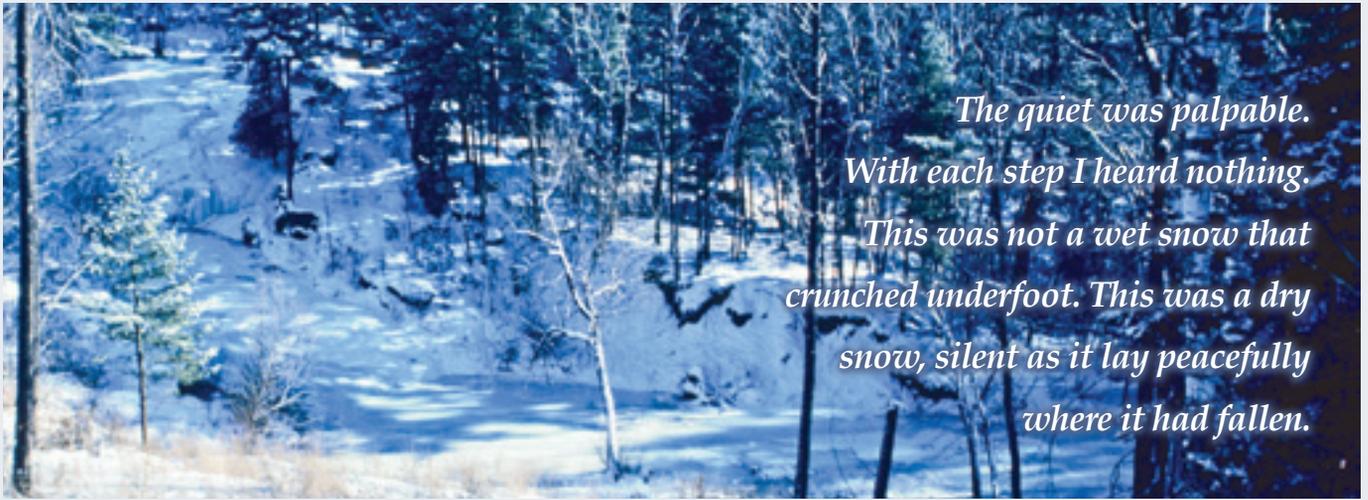
My old hound dog, Jack, was waiting on something too. He was looking forward to a nice breakfast, and if he was very lucky, a good romp in the woods with his best friend, me.

It has long been known that a dog is a man's best friend. In this case Jack was very happy to be a boy's best friend. And the boy returned the sentiment.

I had a unique whistle that only Jack could understand as spoken word, "Come on Jack! Let's go for a walk." On this crisp morning the whistled proposition didn't need to be carried on wind. It rang loud and clear on the still morning air.

And so it was off to the woods, with me, a boy, trailing my guide dog, trail-blazer and best friend. Ever with Jack's nose, his sensor unit, huffing fresh fallen dry snow while snuffling brush and trail. This was the start of a good walk —

DNR FILE



*The quiet was palpable.
With each step I heard nothing.
This was not a wet snow that
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DNR FILE

a walk that would be locked in memory for a lifetime.

Surprisingly, the air was calm. The overnight storm spent its fury before the calm dawn. Horizontally driven snow had made its transition to peaceful vertical descent. It sat on and highlighted each tree and branch. Cherished Scotch pine Christmas trees were now naturally flocked to perfection, as if the hand of God had touched them from above with snow from heaven.

The trees and the ground appeared to be sprinkled with diamonds as snow crystals reflected the sun's prism of colors. One may conceivably ask if this is what becomes of rainbows after falling from the sky, and then to reflect the sun's colors in this woods.

The quiet was palpable. With each step I heard nothing. This was not a wet snow that crunched underfoot. This was a dry snow, silent as it lay peacefully where it had fallen. The only thing I noticed were my footprints left behind. And, my thoughts intruding on the beauty, peace and silence.

Chickadees and blue jays appeared. They too were silent. There were no shrieks of "jay-jay" of the blue jays, nor the "chickadee-dee-dee" of the chickadees. They were captivated with the beauty of the woods on the snow covered morning. They were "speechless." It was quiet.

As all the beauty and silence was being appreciated one step took me fairly close to what seemed like a small pile of brush. The silence was broken and my heart leaped with fright while Jack leaped with delight! What was now so incongruent in the silence and beauty was a seeming explosion! A ruffed grouse had flushed with a noisy burst. It too had been enjoying silence until my boot almost fell on it.



Black-capped chickadee searching for food but "speechless."

LISA HODGE-RICHARDSON



Blue jay on a snow covered morning.

HERBERT LANGE

With the reverie broken with a burst of sound and a laugh, it was time to leave these Wisconsin woods for home. Jack, the excited guide dog, would find the way back home. It was a great walk

in unspoiled woods.



Michael D. Louis is a former resident of Stevens Point, who says he has Wisconsin running through his veins. He currently resides in Atlanta, Georgia.