

A House in the Key of 'G'

Now that we live on a ridge top far above the valley floors and wooded creeks there is a new element in our lives. When we lived in the beautiful forest of Houston County she was always in the treetops or down on Highway 16, just slightly removed from my daily story. She was an acquaintance rather than my sister.

There are songs about her; there are myriad stories from pioneer days about how she drove folks insane, literally insane. She is as old as time but she is new to us. We now have a more or less daily encounter and those meetings range from good natured sighs and caresses all the way to howls, the howls of a banshee. The wind is as much a part of this place as the giant Norway spruce and the tiny violets, the robins or the field mice. She is such a presence that we notice it when she takes a break.

The other night, as we were in the third day of one of her howls, when the trees and the sheds and downspouts and the window screens were all vibrating sympathetically, I woke in a vaguely uneasy state. As I said, we are not quite used to her yet. When I sleep I like it cool and quiet and dark. Quiet she is not. I suppose if it blew at a constant velocity it would be more like supermarket Muzak, like the white noise of radio interference. But it rose and fell with all but random modulation, now loud enough to cause alarm and now soft enough to foster calm. She's like that, hammering a loose piece of old tin roof and then letting it rest but just for a beat or two. She sure knows how to play this place, and me.

So I woke up and looked out to see the top of the big elm whipping and straightening, bending but not breaking. It occurred to me that our trees and our bushes and our grasses and our citizens, for that matter, have accustomed themselves over the years to the pounding of the wind. They have all adapted to the point where they are 'wind species', flexible, resilient and remarkably pest free. That's a good thing. The species that can't abide this wind have found environs to suit their own tastes and that's a good thing too. Being an adaptable sort I imagine that, with a little patience and continuing doses of humor, I will become a wind child myself. The alternative would be a life of fighting an elemental force, hardly a model worth pursuing, a tad too existential for me. I'll leave that sort of unending struggle to philosophers and folks who live in flood zones.

Not that she's easy to live with, at least not yet. For the time being, until we get a real irrigation system going, we are watering Ella Bella Farm's burgeoning gardens by hose and sprinklers. When sister wind decides to whip across our acres at 35 miles per hour sprinklers become somewhat comical. An oscillating unit designed to cover 180 degrees now has a stroke of about 91 degrees. When the water gets to straight up it stays there. On the downwind side the spray will fly fifty feet or more while on the upwind side there is only growing pond surrounding the base of the sprinkler. Have you ever tossed your fireplace ashes carelessly, without judging the wind? Have you ever spit off the bow of a boat travelling at any speed at all? That's what I'm talking about. The score on certain blustery days is Wind 10, irrigation 0.

Puddles notwithstanding, the other morning as I made the early rounds, sister wind was carrying the dreamy scent of our prodigious lilacs over the entire yard. I was a hundred feet and around a corner from its source but the aroma was as clear as if the flowers were in a vase in our bedroom. I sometimes think that it must be maddening for the dogs and cats of the planet whose sense of smell is far more acute than our own. What must it be like to catch the scent of something on the wind from a mile or more away? What must it be like to be bombarded by dozens of conflicting scents? In any case, without sister wind, all that olfactory input goes straight up, up and away, unnoticed and unappreciated. No lilac for me. No neighboring dog for Shiloh. It would be a pity indeed.

I wonder if the wind plays the rest of the neighborhood, the county, the world like it plays our place. I wonder if every home has a tone, if every hilltop and grove has a pitch, if all prairies sing a song. Maybe soon on a windy night, the next time I wake as sister wind howls, I will sound a pitch pipe, the kind that choirs use, and determine just where our place stands in the musical scheme of things. By finding its key I could then tailor our music collection to suit it. I could whistle harmony to the house's melody or vice versa.

I think I would like it to be 'G'. 'G' is a friendly key. Not that another key would be disappointing, not at all. But it would be such fun when I'm asked if I play an instrument to say, "Not really but I have a house in the key of 'G'."