

## In The Spring:

The sun is up on the ridge across from us. The line between bright and shadow marches down the slope and across the road. How lovely it is to be sitting in this pre-day knowing, certain, that full day is tumbling towards us. The April birdsong is busy and pushy and optimistic. It seems like every breathing thing is about the business of assuring its own continuance. Lovely.

The air is calm so that last year's oak and hickory leaves, still attached, are hanging straight down. Sometimes I think they are looking groundward, studying their ultimate landing place, cautious and infinitely patient since last fall, feeling the gentle annual push behind them. They study the forest floor that is a perfect brown sea of their predecessors, a uniform continuous blanket saving the early blooms of violets and bellwort from those still chilly nights.

Turn any old log, any random stone and the world of a trillion crawly things is revealed. This enormous machine with its uncountable parts is going about the quiet business of making dirt. It is useful to remember that soil is an end product. Good ground is something that gets made, every year and all the time. The tiny beasts that slither and scoot and crawl and burrow and chew it all are doing their business, unrelentingly, to insure that there is a forest floor.

I like to imagine the world from their point of view, in their scale. I think it must be like standing in the foundation pit of some sprawling high rise structure. Workers and machines and tools and debris are everywhere. To the untrained eye it appears to be chaos. How do all the parts know what all the other parts are doing? Surely they must be at cross purposes. But somehow the hole is dug, the base is poured, the steel is set and the next time you look, there's a building growing where the empty ground used to be. I think it must be like that amongst the roots and twigs.

I wonder if it's noisy down there, on the forest floor, under the leaves. Is there the buggish equivalent of air hammers and chop saws and yelling foremen on the phone to the office? Is there traffic control? Are there road signs? How long is the work day? Does a bug have any idea at all.....that he's a bug? Or is making soil the same for a bug that blinking is for us? No need to think about it. It's simply what happens. It's not even a matter of what you intend to do. It just happens. Because it needs to.

Sister Sun is up full now. The air is warming at last. Tiny flying things are bouncing and rolling on whispers of air. They fly like a pot boils, seemingly pointless, oddly repetitive and true to its own purpose. The phoebes are beside themselves with the joy of catching and swallowing the tiny flying things.

These birds return every season to build their nest under our tree level three-season porch. They perch at our eye level and look back at us staring at them, tails bobbing for balance. They are pleased and patient. They let the swarm drift to them. No hurry. And then in a blink they are up. Their flight describes an ellipse once, twice and back to their hidden nest. They have snagged their snack. They'll be back in a while to the same perch looking for the same result. They do this from several different points throughout the hardwoods. They have a rotation of sorts, like a baseball team's road trip. Here, there, over yonder, halfway home and then back again. They do this all day. Every day. They are perfectly happy. They are seeing to it that phoebes persist.

I think that, from their patient perches, the phoebes are amused by the finches and chickadees swarming the seed-filled feeders. They watch those nervous, busy birds piling up and spilling over and chasing competitors and welcoming cousins and all the time proclaiming with their constant chatter that they are available for the familial requisites. The phoebes perch and watch and let their next meal come to them.

The glory is that it all works. The frantic critters get what they need in the way that they need to. The patient critters do every bit as well in their own fashion. It's a comforting thought. There's a pace at which each of us operates best and it doesn't matter a bit how the bird in the next tree does it.