Writer Tom Montgomery-Fate Reflects on Living a Slower Paced Life

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With opening day comes a slower more enjoyable time. And that suits writer Tom Montgomery-Fate just fine. He's the type to just sit in wonder of life's mysteries. Tom Montgomery-Fate teaches writing at College of DuPage in Glen Ellyn. He is currently finishing a nature memoir titled Cabin Fever.

Rain drips from a roof corner in our cabin onto a fist-sized piece of granite. Over decades the drip can wear a hole through the rock. I have seen such holes beneath a roof on a cobblestone street in London, and beneath a waterfall in the White Mountains. But while even solid rock yields to the water's ticking patience, to the timeless rhythm of nature, people don't. We don't live by the drip-tick of water on stone, nor the cycle of sun and moon. Our species has almost triumphed over these primitive gauges of time.

Last week I perused a display of pricey cast-iron sundials in a garden store. But the fifty pound pre-rusted yard ornaments cast shadows that no one knows how to read. Women, evading the clock of their own bodies, can now schedule their births for a convenient day––to fit their health leave or their obstetrician's golf commitments. When aging men lose their hair or their erections they take drugs to bring them back. We can now project ourselves in image and voice all over the world at any time on I phones and laptops. We are ageless multi-present multi-taskers, which is why some of us feel so disconnected and distracted and flee to the woods––to re-member our selves––to evade the miracles of our own technology, of human nature.

By late afternoon the dripping finally stops and I go outside to inspect the lump of granite. At first touch I think I feel a small depression. But no, there is nothing, not the slightest indentation. I don't pick the rock up, or move it, but leave it exactly where it is, knowing it will rain again, and again, and again. My hope: in forty years, when my eight-year-old son Bennett is my age, he will be sitting in this cabin some day and notice a steady dripping and then go outside to find the fist-sized rock. Then he will touch it with his fingers and feel the reign of time––a tiny dent in eternity that bridges our lives––and be filled with wonder.

Wonder, and the reverence it brings, is the best part of human nature. I feel it now––standing in this meadow in dusk. The bright trill of returning birds and rumbling whir of Interstate 94, just a mile away, ride the same breeze. This evening, other than the unmistakable lament of a mourning dove, I recognize only two bird calls: a cardinal and a robin. The rest of the dipping whistles and twittering vibratos are a blur. I blame this on the usual suspects––on the starlings, the great impersonators¬¬––rather than my ignorance. A good birder would know, could tell

the difference between an imitation and the real thing, between a blurry truth and a simple fact. But I often can't and get lost somewhere in the middle.

So I try to compare the sounds of the birds to those of the distant engines––the melody of bone and blood to the drone of steel and diesel, to the unending stream of semi trucks. Last week I walked the three-quarters of a mile from the cabin to I 94 and stood on the thundering overpass with my eyes closed for twenty minutes, listening intently. But I could not discern the different breeds. The Peterbilt, the Mack, and the Kenworth all sounded and smelled the same—the roar of approach, the slight quaver of the bridge, the smoky burn of retreat. These trailers, some as large as small homes, are transfer containers that were filled with shirts in Haiti, shoes in Indonesia, telephones in China, mangoes in Mexico. There are millions of them in perpetual migration. They carry whatever we want wherever we want it, yet never quite relieve our longing, our hunger for something else, something unseen.

I return to the cabin and sit down to read. Soon dusk becomes night. Darkness consumes every tree and stone. The birds stop singing and the crickets start. Interstate 94, however, is relentless. Tomorrow night I will ride that river of headlights back to my home and family in suburban Chicago. On those long trips around the lake through the darkness I'm always aware of how in-between I live: in-between the woods and the mega mall, the blue jay and the Buick, the animal and the human, the precise ticking of a clock and the wondrous dripping of the rain.