

Turkeys

By Gail Grenier Sweet ©2003

The clock radio clicks on. 6:00 a.m. First, world news, then announcer Obie says, "It's a morning with teeth."

Mike and I gird ourselves accordingly. Coat, hat, hood, muffler, gloves, mittens over gloves. Time for the Bug Line, the old railroad path just down the road.

This morning the Bug Line belongs to us only — no walkers or bikers to worry our dog, Maggie. I unclip the leash from her collar and our 14-year-old mutt becomes a pup again, galloping and checking messages at every fencepost.

The posts sag now, many seasons after being plugged into the ground by county workers in a year the county must have needed to burn funds fast. The split-rail fence was designed to keep horses and their apples segregated from the rest of us. Sometimes that worked.

Now it looks as if some rogues have come in the night, liberated a number of rails from their leaning posts, and constructed a bridge across the Fox River that runs lazily along the trail.

Bundled, walking, getting warmer, Mike and I glance at the rough bridge when suddenly I notice movement in the woods beyond.

I stop. I stare. A flock of wild turkeys stares right back.

They are clearly disturbed by our presence. They skitter back and forth in their deep wall-to-wall forest carpet of burnt sienna-colored leaves. The leaves make a big noise, as if shuffled by a herd of deer instead of 20 fat birds. The turkeys are almost purple in their greyness, and amazingly plump, like a bunch of peahens at the zoo.

Mike and Maggie and I move on and leave them in peace.

Since that day, we've seen them often, always in the same spot. They seem less startled by us now, just freeze and watch us. I think about hunters and history and muskets. I suppose somewhere in their little pea-brains they store the same ancient memory.

Muskets were never part of life for Mike and me. Our hunting grounds are desks, computers and telephones. Instead of stalking to hunt, we walk to exercise. The turkey in our freezer came from the store. We rise with the clock radio, not the sun. We've come a long way — or not. Either way, we're glad to be here, glad to be thankful.

The End