

Back Trails

Perspectives on People and Nature

John Bulmer

Life Is Where You Look by John Greenwood

Jeff Nadler

As a leftover milkman, it's in my blood to be up early in the morning. On my birthday, I decided to take an early morning June walk as a gift to myself.

In my little corner of the world in Wilton, New York, I am surrounded by hundreds of homes where once there were forests, fields and farmland. You might find that sad, but honestly it has been a great place to raise my family. As I came to the end of my road, I stopped to listen to the chorus of songbirds, and to reflect on the serenity that surrounded me in this now highly developed area. After all, it was six o'clock on a Sunday morning. It was then that I heard the most beautiful song coming from high atop a light pole in a nearby parking lot. I approached it slowly. I could not believe what I was hearing.

The sounds were crisp and distinct, but rapidly changing, as if mechanical. Chirp, chirp, chirp, whistle, whistle, caw, caw, caw; the concert grew louder and more intriguing. Was that the sound of a kitten's meow? I swear I heard a cricket on top of that light pole. For a brief moment, I thought I heard a seagull's cry, but there were no gulls in sight.

One of the most amazing creatures I have ever experienced—a mockingbird, was providing this medley of natural sounds. If you have never witnessed this display of talent, you will not believe your ears. My heart raced; I wanted to somehow capture nature's personal birthday gift to me. No one would believe what I was listening to right smack dab in the middle of new homes, townhouses and offices. We can despise or embrace technology and growth, but just as I was about to go down



the path of longing for the good old days, I reached into my back pocket and pulled out one of life's most revered technological wonders: a cell phone. It was only a few days old and has more options than a new Toyota. Earlier in the week as I researched its abilities, I remembered seeing an audio icon with the word "recorder" listed below it. Could I actually use this phone to record these sounds? Now, if I could just figure out how to record before the concert ended. With slightly more technological skill than a cement block, I was able to push the record button, and the taping began.

This feathered master of imitation, the mockingbird, can recreate sounds that you cannot imagine. Here are just a few I was able to identify: seagull, robin, bullfrog, whip-poor-will, chipmunk, crow, nuthatch, and as I mentioned previously, a kitten's meow. Just when I thought I had watched enough Animal Planet and National Geographic Channel to see and learn everything humanly possible about

nature's wonders, it happened: the most amazing sound to ever echo through the treetops came from that little bird of grey, black and white. This was a sound that would make any man, woman or child stop dead in their tracks and listen—the piercing shrill of a modern-day car alarm. I cannot replicate the sound with words, but that mockingbird, the size of a quart of milk, blasted off a half-dozen shrills and whistles unmistakably identified as a human-manufactured car alarm, and I just recorded it on my cell phone.

There are many gifts in my life: a beautiful wife, healthy, warm-hearted sons, harvest moons, and Cape May sunsets, but this was something special. I have a newfound appreciation for technology, and I have a new mantra to live by: "Life is where you look."

With this essay, **John Greenwood** of Gansevoort won first place in DEC's Great Stories from the Great Outdoors contest in January, 2011.