

## *Summer Solstice Reflection ~ Trees of Two River Regions*

by Lorne Peterson

In the Eastern Piedmont Hills, where branches of the Potomac descend through stream valleys in rills, runs and falls into the river, summer came on June 20, 2004 with a difference. It was a blue-sky day with temperatures in the low 70s F. This bright day with clear crystalline air of the north land seemed out-of-place. The normal weather of the mid-Potomac region in this change of seasons is soft and humid air with temperatures in the mid-80s F.

I didn't mind this change in the usual summer solstice weather. The clear air and comfortable temperatures made it easier to adapt to being back in the Eastern Piedmont area of the Potomac, after a weeklong holiday in Shenandoah National Park, Virginia. There in the Blue Ridge Mountains, at altitudes of 3,500 to 4,000 feet, I had been enjoying temperatures in the low 70s. Susan and I go there in May or June to hike the trails and to visit north land trees in the "Canada Zone" ecology of the mountains. It's enjoyable to be among grey birch, striped maple, sugar maple, basswood, balsam fir and red spruce. These familiar trees gave us a feeling of being at home, reminding us of our connections with the Kichisipi ~ Ottawa ~ Outaouais River region.

We also went to the Limberlost trail to visit tall eastern hemlocks whom we had come to know well. But by 2004, the woolly adelgid, an exotic invasive insect accidentally imported from Asia, had killed most eastern hemlocks in Shenandoah National Park. These venerable hemlocks suffered further damage, in the autumn of 2003, when hurricane Isabel stormed through Shenandoah Park with fierce winds, blowing over many of the hemlocks into precarious positions on the Limberlost Trail. Park staff had to cut the dead and dying trees. It was disheartening to see great hemlocks, 300- to 400-years-old, cut down along with all the younger ones.

This is a tragedy in which we human residents of the land have played many roles. Our introduction, intentional and unintentional, of invasive exotic *flora* and *fauna* species are resulting in the destruction of the native ecology of the land; and our gaseous ways of life are changing the climate, disrupting the rhythms of the seasons, and making storms and droughts extreme.

There is almost no place to travel to where one can get away from our continuing destruction of the nature of life. As noted for decades, this means that we need to give attention to learning to live in ways that contribute to the well being of all our fellow inhabitants of the land.

In the midst of this native ecology disintegration, there are people everywhere acting with courage, creativity and dedication as individuals, as communities and in public agencies to protect and preserve nature. People are also learning ways of life based on care and respect for the land. This is what gives me hope.

On June 21, the temperatures in the mid-Potomac region began rising into the low 80s F and the air became soft and humid. This felt more normal, and who knows, maybe it had something to do with the many people who are working in neighborhoods and communities, and in government public services or in conservation organizations, to contribute to the well being of the land. We are only beginning to perceive the ways our acts reverberate throughout and around our Earth home.

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Lorne Peterson

2004

Spring Branch valley, Virginia, Eastern Piedmont Hills, mid-Potomac River region

*\*This 2015 version is based on a story written in © 2004, 20i5, by Lorne Peterson, a photographer and writer of nature, people and place. He lived in the mid-Potomac River region from late-autumn 1995 to the early summer of 2012, when he returned to live in the lower Kichisipi ~ Ottawa – Outaouais River region. For permission to use this story in part or whole, contact lornep@copper.net*