

I sit at Oerwood in twilight, reading Richard Wagner's autobiographical sketch. A crisp evening air foretells coming autumn; slanting rays of an early-setting sun are backlighting the woods to the west. A continuo of crickets and locusts is interwoven with an obligato of tree frogs and the occasional toad, punctuated now and then with pheasant or catbird. Cardinals and bluejays, vociferous this morning, are silent now. Wood thrushes, still loquacious a month ago, won't be heard again until May. Two deer walked by earlier, unperturbed by my presence. Orange jewelweed blossoms bedeck the lush late-summer foliage.

Increasingly this sanctuary - this precious oasis - becomes more urgently just that: the crescendo of road noise on all sides, sounds of digging machinery to the north and east, the angry snarl of dirt bikes across George Street, the all-night dull drone of machinery to the south, twenty-four-hour lighting ever-closer, illuminating noisy midnight factory shift changes across the street, housing development encroaching on the north and west -- all these contribute to the squeeze on this land.

No one you talk to wants another mall in the York area, yet the masses pour into them. Returning to the area after an eight-month absence has opened my eyes in alarm to the increase in population and attendant burgeoning traffic. No one denies it, but will they ever see that endless expansion, so touted by chamber-of-commerce types, can only spell disaster? It doesn't take a Cassandra to know that the earth's resources are finite. The encroachments I name are among the factors responsible for a decline in quality of life in the York area (gradual at first, alarmingly accelerating in recent years) since I moved to a peaceful and lovely York County thirty years ago.

Dusk is deepening; the pink and pale blue of the western sky darken. Nature's night sounds dominate. A noisy flock of geese flies eastward into the rising full moon. The temperature drops; it is sweater time. The

coming of fall brings a melancholia suffused with hope. Cardinals and jays will speak tomorrow; thrushes will sing in the spring. It is peaceful here. All thanks to Oerwood. Hang in there, blessed sanctuary!

Robert W. Patterson, Jr.
September 4, 1990

Tears For Disappearing Nature In York County

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Robert W. Patterson, Jr.

(Robert Patterson Jr. lived at Oerwood in Manchester Township for 14 years and recently moved to Maine. He returns to Oerwood occasionally because of his association with Denning Travel Camp.)