



Tom Sheehan
Caught beside the River

THE VIEWS FROM MY FAVORITE WINDOW, in my favorite chair, driveway side of the house looking down over the First Iron Works in America and the river, are as far apart as the North and South Poles, and yet I need no measuring stick, no tape measure, no modern calculator, no other contrivances that catch majesty loose around me, on the daily run where the Saugus River centers much of everyday life. So many gifts of observation come to me where I sit most patiently by the window in a house built in 1742, and which is still in place. And a 100 years *before* this house was constructed, the water providing the power via water wheel to the huge blowers for the old furnace ran through a channel in the area now occupied by my front steps and front lawn ... here in the lap of history where the Iron Works had its run roughly from 1632-1638. It is a place where I first slammed a spade into those grounds in 1948 and worked there in parts of years from that day in 1948 until I graduated from Boston College in 1956 after army service in Korea, all my time there as directed by Roland "Rolie" Robbins, site archeologist, a man of vision.

More time spent in that chair by that window, as charted by age and reduced mobility, presents me with unfolding drama, observation, constant road traffic, the occasional blunders of drivers, the racing of fire engines, trucks making deliveries to the newest tenants of the old Scotts Mill directly across the street from me, many constitutional walkers by selves or in pairs, and many kind folks walking dogs, small, medium and large, and all on leashes.

I've seen accidents, near accidents, Volkswagens on their sides, Fords meeting Chevies in abrupt introductions, motorcycles on parades; oh you name it and I've seen it.

Wilderness House Literary Review 11/2

I know the high tide of the river as the Atlantic makes its two-a-day trips to the rear of Scotts Mill, can see the river at high tide against a far curve and banking, and above that curve, through marsh grass and clutches of trees I can see some of the traffic on Hamilton Street, both ways, as it snaps between spaces in such sparse obstructions. At night the car lights also poke through parking spots at the rear of the small mall across from the fire and police stations.

Saugus ever on the move.

Wild life under view comes innumerable, especially the winged kind, in colony, company, flock, parliament, party, the common terms for their groupings or the specialized terms such as a bevy of quail, bouquet of pheasants, cast of hawks, charm of finches, covey of partridges, flight of swallows, gaggle or skein of geese, siege of heron, trip of dotterel, wisp of snipe, or nye of pheasants (though deeper research will reveal such choices as brood, nide, nest, bevy or covey, history coming into play here.)

Pigeons, too, come in flocks of 25 or 50 on some days to grace electric wires running from Central Street electric poles to poles at the top of the Bridge Street path, at the curve on Central Street. On these days it is part of many walking tours of the area and a daily exercise course for many Saugonians.

The attached photo came to me from Harry Mazman who received it from Martha Parasco Coombs, a former resident of Lothrop Street and now living in her mid 90s in South Carolina, shows youngsters more than a half century ago posing at the setting of the old bridge which then was in sad repair. Families represented here probably included Hashem, Anganis, Tura, Gabriel, Parasco, Saulnier, Beauchanis, Burton, Kosavis, Sheehan, Calhoun, Brocklebank, etc.

Minute flyers among the winged brethren of the area are sparrows and wrens and other small odd sorts that are nameless to me. Some of them are seasonal and some are not. Some come in their flight patterns or on special food hunting expeditions in overhead search. I've been introduced to aerial tactics of turkey vultures and egrets and cranes and ospreys and herons and other hunters who dive into or skim over the river's surface hunting for prey. High tide brings some flyers from the sea; sometimes it is low tide that turns the key on search activity.

Territorial rights hold sway here, for I have seen both hawks and eagles sit their trees with magnificent grace and a careful eye on this corner of the river, this part of the territory. But twice in recent times, once a few days earlier than this writing, just past, and once about two months ago for a few minutes, the drama exceeded itself. ("Here I sit," someone upon a throne once said in sovereignty, now lost to me in a forgotten drama.)

It is superb flight when aerial combat takes place above the river, such as on the recent ninth day of May, when a hawk and an eagle, the eagle at least three times the size of his opponent, lit up these skies in their combat, in their imperial statements without words. But I can imagine the shrieking cries above that pierced meager clouds... for you only see such great hunters when there are clouds above them and their prey where the sun throws no shadows, does not reveal the overhead threats on the wing.

Wilderness House Literary Review 11/2

Aerial Combat above the Saugus River, territorial contestants in winged and gymnastic battle, maneuvers so graceful, so quick, so tantalizing close in striking order that it seems miracles power the evasions, direct the escape measures. In this latest contest, the eagle rolled over four or five times in his dominion of the sky, those huge wings shifting black against the sky (like a flying Pegasus on a new playground), to try to snare, clutch, scar or scare the smaller ... and more elusive ... hawk ... to no avail. Their field of battle surely must have gone beyond the river's scope for they made endless forays of attack across much of the visible sky, their wings slashing for space, speed, and control, the powerful talons reaching, stretching, thrusting for grasp, for a grip on tender parts, to hurt or wound the opponent, to deliver an ultimatum about these parts of air space and therefore ground control of the land and water beneath their wings. The speed and grace, the flying abilities of both of them, appeared to be without peer in such combat; at least to my eyes, Nature herself providing the latest of hit films..

Now, caught anew at my window thinking about such occurrences in the passages of flight, a Marine Forward Observer, on a mountaintop in Korea, once said of a squad of Marine planes that had just flown over our position, "That's Ted Williams and his gang."

Flight is impressive, from any angle, any site.