

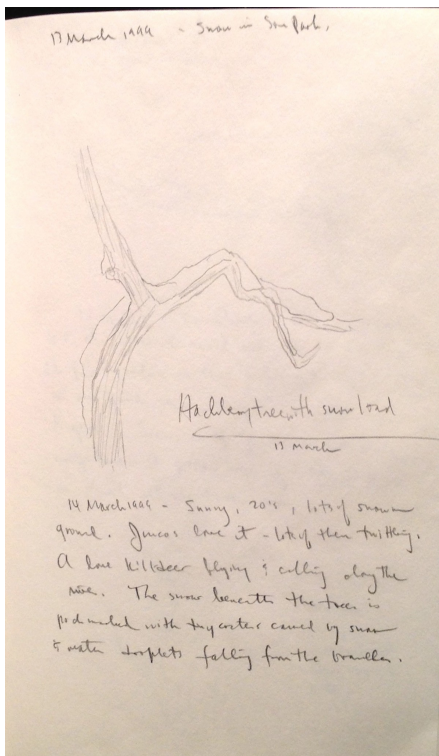
## Nature Journaling

*A way help you to slow down, look around, and take note of your life as you live it so that you can savor it now and again and again in the future.*

I have noticed that even on my walks in the outdoors these days, my phone is never far out of reach, and when something catches my eye, out comes the phone, I look at the world through that little screen, tap the shutter icon, and encapsulate the scene in pixels. We all seem to be doing that, and yes, it does let us capture moments, post them to facebook, gather likes and comments. But I have begun to think that perhaps something is missing.

There have been recent articles in the news about students retaining and getting a deeper understanding of material in a classroom setting when they take handwritten notes rather than typing notes into a laptop or tablet. I think the same forces are at work in our interactions with nature.

I recently came across a field journal I kept in 1999. That was a couple of years after I retired, and was walking every morning with my dog. We walked through parks, along the Arkansas River, all year, in all sorts of weather. And though I often carried my 35 mm camera to photograph flora and fauna, I also carried a notebook and pencil. Occasionally I supplemented the pencil with a small watercolor case or a few colored pencils. I made an effort to make some sort of notes every day. Often mundane observations, nothing ever very dramatic, but I found that taking the time to really look at things, to look at them closely enough to commit them to paper, I absorbed so much more, noticed things that might have easily been glossed over by a quickly snapped photo.



Here's an example: We had a nice snow overnight on March 13th. This is a simple little sketch of the branches of a hackberry tree. I was captivated by how the snow had fallen and clung to the branches. So I stopped and looked long enough to do this simple sketch. The next day the snow was beginning to melt and drop off the trees and I noticed pockmarks in the snow. Nothing very important or earth shattering, but when I

reread these notes, I could recall the look of that snow all these years later.

A few days later, 19 March. Weather warm, soft drizzle falling. Walking along I saw the daylight illuminating drops of water that were clinging to the twigs of a mulberry tree. When I went up to look closely at the tree, I saw how the water had collected at a bud and the shape of the drop as gravity pulled at it.

My favorite plants, trees and flowers

notwithstanding, are the prairie grasses. And darn, they are difficult to photograph. Why not stop, take a seat, and really look at a single stalk of grass and get to know it. Grab a pencil and a piece of paper and take some time. Here are some examples of my encounters with grasses.



A windy day in October, Indian Grass bending, bowing in the blowing wind. A quick pencil sketch of the flower head, the slender whipping leaves.

Then, a quieter day, still in October. The sun is out, the Indian Grass glowing. Time to get out water colors and try to match some of those wonderfully subtle but majestic tints.



And don't ignore the Big Bluestem. Standing there at eye-height. Those turkey-foot flower spikes.

I look at these sketches and I can feel again the cool October air, the warmth of the late morning sun, see my yellow lab, Joe, sniffing through the grass, smell the hay-like aroma of the fall prairie.

So, here's my advice. One day soon, leave your camera home. Okay, if you can't do that, at least leave it in your pocket. Pick up a pencil and a

notebook or scratchpad. Go for your walk. The first time you see something and say to yourself "Ooooh, I need to snap a picture of that," take a deep breath instead. Get out the paper and pencil. Really look at what caught your eye. Sketch it. If not a drawing, a word sketch. Jot down a line or two about how you feel looking at it. What it brings to your mind. While you are doing that, listen. Hear anything? Breeze stirring leaves? Insects buzzing? Birds twittering? Make a note. Nothing too elaborate. Just a little hint that you can look at or read fifteen years

from now, a key to the lock on the vault of your memories that you will be able to open and bring this moment alive once more.

~ Roy Beckemeyer

**Roy Beckemeyer**, a retired aeronautical engineer who has studied natural Kansas as an avocation for years, , with special emphasis on prairie plants, birds, and insects (focusing on dragonflies, damselflies, robber flies, and Paleozoic insect fossils), is also a practicing poet whose first book, "Music I Once Could Dance To" (Coal City Press, 2014), was a 2015 Kansas Notable Book. He and wife Pat, married 55 years, live in Wichita.