

BLACK DOG LAKE

A Short Story
By O. William

(Originally published March 2007)

In the middle of a particular blustery July day, I decided I needed a break from the cacophony of modern day living and being somewhat in the vicinity of the Back Dog Lake Power Plant, drove to the outskirts of the city toward the entrance of the surrounding wetlands.

Entering the adjoining trail from the parking lot, I descended down a long embankment toward the left. The trail leveled off when it reached the old lake bottom, still marshy and green from the spring run-off. I hadn't eaten since breakfast, but I had stowed some cheese, peanuts, and an orange in my pack, which hung from my back.

I headed off in a northeasterly direction, following the trail next to a small pond engulfed with water lilies.

I remember there was an open field of grassland, sparsely populated with wild flowers; I crossed a rickety old bridge and veered off to my right. The trail followed a muddy stream down to the wet banks of the lake. The trail then followed the lake's shoreline, I, in my old sneakers going up and down the gulleys and small valleys where small streams once emptied out into the lake, shoes getting heavy and loose from the mud. I followed the trail north for some time until it got too muddy to continue on. Moreover, trail bikes had churned up the dark wet soil obscuring any sign of a trail.

I had hiked for a few hours, and I decided to turn around and go back. It was late in the afternoon and the sky had turned dark. Storm clouds moved in. I was very hungry. The trail disappeared when it reached the stream. I remembered fording the stream, seeing the deep grooves those dirt bikes had carved on its soft sandy sides. Once on the other side, it appeared the trail split in two. Neither way looked familiar. One followed the edge of the lakeshore and was muddy; the other went up a hill to dryer ground. I took

the latter only to find that it divided into six smaller trails going off in tangents to the north and east. I needed to go south and west to find the lot where my car was parked.

Panicking I quickly retraced my steps back to the main junction. Funny, I didn't remember the trail being muddy. The wind had suddenly picked up so I plowed ahead along the lower trail. I feared I was lost.

The sky was black. It started to rain. It rained intermittently at first but then it began to pour. I was getting drenched, my shoes soaked in mud and slime. I began to run awkwardly over the trail. The rain devoured the trail, leaving not a trace. I lost my way- and in the dark, I wound up going around in circles as the trail had completely disappeared beneath my feet.

There was a slight break in the wind and the rain. Shaken, I realized that I had been going around in circles. I started to go off in the right direction but where was the right direction?

At that moment, the storm stopped. The sun broke through the clouds and I could see where I was. I was in a field of tall yellow marsh grasses. As the sunlight penetrated it cast every thing in a golden hue. I looked up at the sun but it was so bright I was blinded. I feel to my knees praying, thanking God for bringing me through this. At that moment, the tall grasses were as if a thousand angels swinging and swaying in the soft summer air. This moment has forever been burned in my memory. I shall never forget it.

Miraculously, I remembered exactly where the trail had been. I could see clearly again. Despite my hunger, I felt I had new energy.

The trail resumed along the lake. Through new puddles of water, I trod onward past the culvert gushing forth, past the spring pond with the beaver dam and lilies, over the wooden bridge that traversed the upper tributary and into the colorful flower meadow. The remnants of the farmer's field with its tangled barbed wire and fossilized cow paddies came into view.

I was almost home, but out of breathe. On the way back, I needed to go through the large gravel bed to get to the steep hill leading up to the parking lot. Small pebbles ground underfoot, some got into my shoes, making it painful to walk. Exhausted, I pulled myself up the hillside trail and hobbled across the parking lot, unlocked the car and collapsed inside.

To be lost and yet to be found, to see but be surrounded by darkness. To be confused, yes to be going around in circles, but to find one's way with God's help is truly a miracle. To be challenged to work hard in one's daily life, is all that we need to do, but to thank God and ask his grace is all that we must do.