

Microcosm: Kirby Billingsley Hydro-Park, Oct. 24, 2018

By Jean Richtsmeier

Leaves from the overhanging elm trees are floating in the water. The small fish of last visit are not present. The sun is muted by the clouds making the water surface textured: a metallic black waded with silver highlights.

One lone duck swims this way. Curious to me to see only one but in less than a minute, the loud quacks of others states that the ducks are here together. I have felt the heat on other afternoons, but today my sweatshirt is a comfort.

From my rock perch, the gray furrowed tree trunks of the park act like picture frames for the deciduous tree leaves in the distance. The colors are more muted than last week and the leaves are actively falling to the ground. The yellow is now burnt umber and the orange is rust. The leaves have completed a lot of their work but the work of composting for the soil gives them good reason to float from above to the earth below.

BNSF Railroad is muscling cargo westward. I am grateful for the railroad that gave my father the salary to raise five daughters. The train today has three forward engines and two rear engines: power for the trip up Steven's Pass. More leaves are boating on the Columbia than when I arrived. Many are littering the rock where I sit and some have gathered at the snag that stretches into the water.

I am inspired by quotes I read today by NASA astronaut, James Lovell of the 1968 Apollo Mission. He mused, "We had pictures before of the far side of the moon, so we knew what to expect. What we didn't expect was to see the Earth as it really is. I put my thumb up to the window and could hide the Earth. Suddenly, I realized that I am 240,000 miles away, but behind my finger is a planet with about 4 billion people. That told me in a moment just exactly what we are in the universe."

In response to the question about how his philosophy changed by this encounter with Earth, Lowell explained, "There's an old saying – I hope to go to heaven when I die - . Suddenly, it dawned on me that we went to heaven when we were born! We arrived on a planet that had the right amount of mass to have the gravity to contain water and an atmosphere, just at the proper distance from a star. It appeared to me that God had given mankind sort of a stage to perform on. I guess how that play will turn out is up to us."