

My West Window

When we're young, we see things differently than when we're old. But some of our visions remain constant, no matter what our age. I grew up in a farmhouse and I was very lucky, because my bedroom window was upstairs on the second floor, and I had a west window.

West windows are so much more serene than east windows. I could awaken every morning to the sound of birds singing in the maple trees outside, with no unnecessary brightness that an east window brings. And I could go to sleep every night with the same birds singing, and the softer, milder light of sunset adorning my bedroom.

Sunsets are a special time for everyone. They are a part of your life, your existence. They are a special time just for you. They're more than just splashes of red and gold in a blue sky, they're more than a way to forget the day's triumphs, or the day's hurts and slights, they're more than merely drawing the curtain on your sadness or joy. They're a time to think on the day just passed, and a time to dream about the tomorrow unborn. They're a time to appreciate the immensity and beauty of the earth, and to be thankful that you're alive to see another sunset.

I kept my bed right next to the window, and being upstairs enables you to see so much more of the landscape, so much more of the majesty of the sky, so much more of the parade of the seasons.

The sill of the open window made a good place for my gray cat to sleep during warm summer nights. We both got to see the sun going down on many a fine day. We both got to feel the cool evening breeze easing through the screen. We both got to watch the rain and the snow and the wind in the trees.

What an adventure it was, to gaze out of that window at night. The earth is a different place at night, and there's a special feeling to being the only one awake when all the rest of the world is asleep.

I'd see the big moon overhead, shining down brightly on the land. Everything seemed to glow in the light. I could watch the moon going through its phases, from a thin smile just after sunset to a big, incandescent night light in the midnight sky. I could see the beginnings and endings of lunar eclipses, with the moon taking on a curious, eerie, red color. I could see the moon glowing behind a veil of high clouds – sometimes with a ring, and sometimes without – and came to know by this what kind of weather to expect.

I'd look at the distant horizon – that place where earth meets sky – so dim, so empty and vast in the moonlight. I'd wonder what lay beyond it, and I knew that some day I would have to

go and find out. I'd look at the fields in between, lying bare with black dirt, or green and thick with corn, or flat and covered with bitter snow.

Sometimes I couldn't see the moon at all, but only a murky gray-blackness, and I could hear the approaching thunder. I could see the fearsome lightning bolts, just on the horizon, getting gradually closer and closer. I could see the thunderstorm at night, the whole western sky lit up with fantastic, unworldly claws of lightning arcing through the clouds. I could feel the rush of wind and the slap of rain through the screen as the storm finally broke overhead. Out would come my cat from the sill, retreating to the safer, drier bed. Down I'd push the sash against the violence of the storm. Nighttime thunderstorms can be a frightful event when you're young, and at night you can never be sure how bad the storm really is until it's too late.

On calmer, clearer nights, I'd study the stars. I'd stare at them for hours. I knew their mystical names: Sirius and Arcturus and Aldebaran, and others. Sometimes I could see a shooting star racing across the night sky, momentarily breaking the tranquility of the night. I knew all the annual dates of the big meteor showers, and patiently stayed up until very, very late, waiting for the show to begin, until ultimately sleep overcame me. I never did see very many dazzling meteor showers, and I was always certain the best show began sometime after I fell asleep.

I came to know the constellations, those legends in the sky so important to our ancestors, but so ignored by us. I came to know Ursa Major and Cassiopeia, and Andromeda and Taurus and the Pleiades and more. I came to know at what time and at what season of the year they would appear outside my window. I'd actually miss them as they went below the horizon, Orion and Pisces and Canis Major. They were my companions on many nights.

In the autumn I could watch the leaves on the maple trees change color, from green to red and yellow and brown. I could see them fall to the ground. I could see the trees standing bare and black in the autumn mists. I could see all the plants die, grass and flowers and shrubs, as life retreated from the earth, as everything went to sleep for the long, cold winter.

I could see the snowflakes crowding down on a morning when I had to go to school and didn't really want to. I could feel the cold up against the glass and see the frost forming feathers of ice on the storm window outside. I could see blizzards of snow and wind and clouds. I could see frigid sunsets over a cold, white, barren land.

I could see on the trees the first bright leaves of spring. I could always tell when spring was due, by checking my constellations.

In spring, with the window once again open, I could smell the earth, freshly turned by the farmer's plow. I could hear all the different birds announce the arrival of warmer weather and with it, new life. I could smell the hay that had been cut that day, and I could smell the corn when the tassels were ripe.

If I was having some trouble, if something was troubling my young, inexperienced mind, I could look out my west window. I could study the timelessness of sun and moon and stars. I

could take comfort from the beauty of trees and clouds and grass. And eventually my problems seemed smaller, more trivial, compared to the vastness I saw. I could know that no matter what happened, the stars were still there for me, the seasons would change, and life would renew itself.