



SIGURD FERDINAND OLSON

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Sigurd Olson Environmental Institute
Northland College
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IN PRAISE OF SIGURD OLSON

Remarks Delivered on January 16, 1982, at the First Presbyterian Church, Ely, Minnesota.

To be asked by Elizabeth to say some words today is one of the great honors of my life. To come up with words that could do justice to a man of literature, to a practitioner of language, to one who delighted in the use, power and beauty of the English tongue—that is a task that alone I could not possibly have undertaken.

So Wendy and I talked about this on Thursday night and Friday. Understanding that this is, of course, a funeral, yet need we be funereal, I asked her? Surely wit, good humor and certain comic sense flowed often from Sig. Would it be appropriate, I asked, to retell that wonderful story about the vain French poodle named Fido, but spelled PHYDEAUX? No, she said, so I had to give that up. Might I relate the triumphs of the three Conquistadores (Sig, Elizabeth and Wendy), those modern-day swashbucklers who triumphantly invaded Cartagena, Colombia, and the Spanish Main four years ago? No, she insisted, that just wouldn't do. Could I recall some of the joy of three years ago when we drove together to Beloit College where Sig received an honorary

degree and where our dear friend, Martha Peterson, then Beloit's president, called him a "national treasure?" We just called him NT for short after that. It was on that same journey that one of us remembered that Lincoln announced the fall of Vicksburg, last of the important Confederate bastions on the Mississippi, like this: "The Father of Waters flows unvexed to the sea." Hence, every small stream we saw in Wisconsin that weekend flowed unvexed to the sea. The Flambeau flowed unvexed to the sea. The Sugar River flowed unvexed to the sea. The Yahara flowed unvexed to the sea. And, of course, the mighty Namakagon flowed right by the house and farm in Seeley unvexed to the sea. But, no Wendy said, that would not be appropriate for the occasion, so I will not mention those episodes.

So I did what I always do under circumstances like this, and Sig often did the same—that is—to draw on the wisdom of those great writers who help us stumble forward in expressing and acknowledging our feelings. Shakespeare always helps: Act 1, Scene 2: Horatio says of Hamlet's father: "I saw him once. He was a goodly king." Hamlet responds: "He was a man, take him for all in all, I shall not see his like again."

William Wordsworth has what Matthew Arnold called "healing power." This passage from "Ode on Intimations of Immortality" speaks across the decades to us with freshness and hope.

Then sing, ye birds, sing, sing a joyous song!

And let the young lambs bound
As to the tabor's sound!

We in thought will join your throng.

We that pipe and ye that play,
Yet that through your hearts to-day
Feel the gladness of the May!

What though the radiance which was
once so bright

Be now forever taken from my sight,

Though nothing can bring back the
hour

Of splendor in the grass, of glory in the
flower;

We will grieve not, rather find
Strength in what remains behind;
In the primal sympathy
Which having been must ever be;
In the soothing thoughts that

spring

Out of human suffering;

In the faith that looks through

death,

In years that bring the philosophic mind.

In the "Areopagitica," his most celebrated prose work, Milton thundered out for freedom and courage and for redemptive engagement with this world. Sig did the same. Milton wrote:

"I cannot praise a fugitive and cloistered virtue, unexercised and unbreathed, that never sallies out and sees her adversary, but slinks out of the race

where that immortal garland is to be run for, not without dust and heat. Assuredly we bring not innocence into the world, we bring impurity much rather; that which purifies us is trial, and trial is by what is contrary."

And Sig's writings too are of such understanding and consolation at times of loss and transition. He has written with grace and discernment about this season of the year. This is from Sigurd Olson's *Wilderness Days*:

"Winter is the time of year toward which all that has gone before seems but a preparation... When the leaves are down at last, when reds and golds and blues are gone and the earth has changed to browns and grays and the air is rich with the smell of damp and mold, the stage is set. It may come on some quiet day in early November with a hush so deep and so profound it seems to press on everything. All living creatures feel it. They watch the skies and wait... Partridge are in aspen tops feeding on buds, beaver snug in their frozen conical houses feeding on branches below the ice. Deer move into balsam and cedar thickets and blue jays call a challenge to the frozen world. When the bitter cold comes, many will die in the frozen beauty of silver and blue, but life goes on..."

The haunting relevance of that expression of many dying in the frozen beauty of silver and blue will be have escaped this band of people gathered here today to honor one who himself died just three days ago in the winter beauty of silver and blue, here in Ely, Minnesota, his home for nearly a half-century.

We cannot recount today the multitude of accomplishments associated with the life of this

man—a life which spanned the eight momentous decades of our century. That has been done elsewhere, thoroughly, and with great feeling by many persons and institutions who understood the special grace and talents of this man. But let us, at this farewell gathering of praise and remembrance, at least briefly recognize once again the husband, father, grandfather, even great grandfather, cherished relative, friend, teacher, author, philosopher, biologist, poet, veteran of armed service, champion of causes, scientist, lover of nature, faithful Christian church member, loyal American, protector of the boundary waters, world citizen, son of our north, canoeist and guide—the Bourgeois of the Voyageurs.

And let us also acknowledge the presence of mystery here. We know not where we come from, and as the Apostle Paul wrote, "eye hath not seen, ear hath not heard," about the time following death. We come from mystery and go to mystery, with Tennyson, "believing where we cannot prove."

Sig lived easily with mystery, with the intuitive, revelatory side of life. We should seek to know as much as we can, he believed, but must approach the immense unknown with quiet and faith. This is why our horizons should be open, and why we should have listening points, and why he was enchanted "with the calling of loons, northern lights and the great silences of a land lying north and northwest of Lake Superior."

It is a holy mystery why God chooses some people as his special instruments. Job asked that question with passion and intensity.

The current hit play "Amedeus" poses this question with shattering brilliance. The Italian composer in the Austrian court of Joseph II, An-

tonio Salieri, thinks he has made a compact under which he promises to be faithful to God if God would select him to be the chosen vehicle in bequeathing beautiful music to the world. But Salieri was pedestrian and could not express the gift. Young Mozart showed up at the court to write the most shining and glorious and melodic music the world has ever experienced. Human effort from covenants with Salieri failed; the touch of grace was an unfathomable, divine gift to Mozart, and through him all to all of us.

And so it was with Sigurd Olson. He was blessed with special gifts, and he used them completely. He understood duty and served gallantly. His public actions did not stray from his private pronouncements. I think that's one meaning of integrity. He moved the hearts of thousands through his books and his speeches. He touched the lives of hundreds and hundreds of our students and Northland College and elsewhere through his courage, his intelligence, and his example. They want to be like him, and that is why, in the final analysis, the Sigurd Olson Institute was named for him. His long and generous view of history destined him to be a champion of conservation causes. He was a man of style and taste and high standards. Literature enlivened his career and his gifts to the world. Philosophic and religious insight rounded and gentled the man. Extraordinary powers of observation and expression enriched his artistic legacy. In an epoch of feverish mobility in the lives of so many, he had an innate sense of time and of place and that, in fact, became the theme and title of his last book.

We can conclude, then, with Shakespeare, that he was a man, take him for all in all, whose like we will not see again. With Milton, he neither

praised nor had a "fugitive and cloistered virtue." He did not die nor weep for lost causes; he struggled energetically for good and valuable and humane causes here in this world. And with Wordsworth, he helped us understand that there is splendour in the grass and glory in the flower, that soothing thoughts spring from suffering, that there is a faith that looks through death, and that we can aspire to the philosophic mind.

One final word. Sig would not have us leave this holy place today with heavy hearts. He would have had us understand, I believe, that he died as he would have wished. He would ask us to get on with the urgent tasks to which his own life was devoted and to which we are called. He would ask us to set out with lively step on the woodland trails of our own experience. He would insist that our own campsites in life be places of joy and celebration. He would hope that we would cheerfully stride through the forests and meadows and hills and streams and lakes and waterways of our own adventures, with eyes looking with hope and confidence to the far eastern horizon where the sun's glow shows that a new day is dawning. So go forth from here in good heart and with high spirit, refreshed by the presence and inspiration of a great and gifted man who has been among us.

I had prepared the text of these remarks before arriving in Ely yesterday. It was moving beyond description to learn last night from the Olson family that on Wednesday morning, the very day of Sig's death, he had gone once more to the beloved writing shack next to the home on Wilson Street. That day he had typed on his faithful old Royal these words:

"A new adventure is coming up and I know it will be a good one."

This was his last testament of hope and encouragement to us. Let us remember it. And let us remember another passage of his that proclaims that this cold northern winter will inevitably and through eternal mysterious design soon give way to spring:

As snowbanks sink and then disappear, there are drifts of pussy willows in still frozen swamps and then, almost overnight, a brush of Nile green on aspen-covered ridges and in warm cozy nooks out of the wind the rosy hue of maples bursting into bloom. Though the forest floor is still brown and the smell of it is of mold and wetness, by mid-May, it is gay with blue and white hepatica, pink anemones, and—along the flooded banks of creeks—marsh marigolds.

All life is stirring now in lakes, and ponds, and streams, and in myriad tiny pools of snow water. The earth is awake at last after the long winter's sleep, and within it is a quickening. After half a year of frozen silence, spring is a miracle of rebirth, a time of rare transcendent beauty and promise.

—Amen—

course of time can so identify himself with a way of life that when he goes it is not just another passing, then he has achieved a lasting place in the memories of his fellows, a bond they will cherish forever. The broken paddle was an insignia forged in the wilds, of loyalty not only of men to each other but devotion to lasting and eternal things."

The paddle is broken. Let's take a minute now to reflect, in silence, on Sig's life.

Silence was, of course, very important for Sig. He often spoke and wrote of the great silences of the north which are now so difficult to find. Sig was a seeker of these special experiences. Silence was for him a vital part of the singing wilderness—part of the singing he wanted all of us to find and cherish, a singing full of perfect spiritual notes.

Who is not moved reading for the first time Sig's description of a moment as a boy in Door County on the tip of the peninsula where Wisconsin thrusts into Lake Michigan:

"I was alone in a wild and lovely place, part at last of the wind and the water, part of the dark forest through which I had come, and of all the wild sounds and colors and feelings of the place I had found. That day entered into a life of indescribable beauty and delight. There, I believe, I heard the singing wilderness for the first time."

All of us in this room believe that Sig heard that beautiful music while snowshoeing near his home one week ago. The majesty and challenge of the natural world invigorated and animated Sig.

Just a few weeks ago over the holidays, I spent some time with Sig and Elizabeth at their son Bob's home in Seeley, just 50 miles south of here. Sig was showing me the sketches which will il-

lustrate *Of Time and Place*, his 9th book to be published this May. He was tingling with excitement and joy and it was inspiring for me to share his love of life and his devotion to literary and visual expression. That's how I will remember Sig and I'll cherish that memory.

For many people here today, Sig was a warm and sensitive friend. For most he was a leader, brimming with what the Finnish call "sisu"—an extraordinary level of courage. For all of us, he was a writer with a gift of immeasurable talent and the commitment to share that gift.

We will miss Sig. We will yet shed tears over the broken paddle. We will think of Sig each time we grip a paddle. But we have so much of Sig. I'm reminded of what Elizabeth told reporters many times during the past few years when they wanted yet another interview: "Read his books," she told them, "It's all there." Let's take her advice. They are his gifts to us. And remember, besides being a writer and a wilderness activist, Sig was a guide. Read his books. It's all there.

TOM KLEIN

OPENING REMARKS

Sig was a voyageur. He thrived on the adventure, the excitement and the danger of wilderness travel. It was his tonic for a world too noisy, too busy and too confining.

In our memorial service today we have attempted to capture some of the voyageur traditions Sig loved so dearly. About the room you will see the beautiful iris. For the 17th century voyageur, the fleur-de-lis was a vivid reminder of the glory of France. In *Listening Point* he notes that "the fleur-de-lis is a bridge between the voyageurs and me." These flowers now grow on many portage trails in the north planted by generations of voyageurs and they grow on the sandy beach at Listening Point planted and nurtured by Sig. In the canoe country 300 years ago, there were rituals signifying the passing of a voyageur. These we have followed. A sash hangs from Sig's canoe and I doubt that many here have failed to notice the broken canoe paddle. It has significance.

Let me quote from *Listening Point*:

"Paddles mean many things to those who know the hinterlands of the north. They are symbolic of a way of life and of the deep feeling of all voyageurs for the lake and river country they have known. Some time ago I received an

envelope bordered in black, one of those old-fashioned conventional letters of mourning which today are no longer used. I glanced at the date and address, tried hard to remember from whom it might be. With hesitation and foreboding, I tore open the seal. Inside was a simple card edged in black and across the face of it the sketch of a broken paddle. In the lower corner was the name.

The significance of this death announcement struck me like a blow. The paddle was broken and my friend who had been with me down the wilderness lakes and of the border regions on many trips had cached his outfit forever. That broken blade meant more than a thousand words of eulogy, said far more than words could ever convey. It told of the years that had gone into all of his expeditions, of campsites and waterways. In its simple tribute were memories of the rushing thunder of rapids, the crash of waves against cliffs, of nights when the loon called madly and mornings when the wilds were sparkling with dew. It told of comradeship and meetings on the trail, of long talks in front of campfires and the smell of them, of pine and muskeg and the song of whitethroats and hermit thrushes at dusk.

I know now, thinking of the broken paddle and what it really meant, that if a man in the

of us to live there, too. He enriched our perception of the world around us, our natural environment as we call it. But he did more than that. He also enriched our perception of ourselves. Listening to him most of the time one might conclude he was talking about wolves and marsh marigolds. But the truth was, he was talking about something more, something that was even nearer to him. He was saying that without wolves and marsh marigolds we cannot be ourselves. His concern here went beyond what we usually have in mind when we speak of the recreational or the aesthetic values of the outdoors. He went deeper than those words commonly take us. From one aspect he saw the human need as physiological, that was his word. After millions of years in the wild, we were tuned, he believed, to its rhythms and we could not break those rhythms entirely without crushing ourselves, without destroying our own nature.

"Man," he wrote, "is in spite of himself still a creature of forests and open meadows, of rivers, lakes and seashores. He needs to look at sunsets and sunrises and the coming of a full moon."

From another aspect, and this is also his word, the need was spiritual. Far horizons of shore and sky give rise to the sense of something vaster still. Through our unity with the life of neighboring creatures we find unity with the whole web of creation. Sigurd Olson believed that empathy with the wilderness brings inward wholeness. And both etymologically and in experience the whole and the holy go together.

In *The Singing Wilderness*, Sig writes of the brush-worn copy of Thoreau that he carried in his pack and to which he resorted in the deep winter nights. Now, toward the end of *Walden*, Thoreau

remarks that not one of his readers has lived a whole, human life. Well, neither has any of Sigurd Olson's readers. But, like Thoreau, he prompts us to keep the possibility alive.

So then, when Sigurd Olson struggled to persuade a not always sympathetic race that they should preserve the wilderness, he was not only speaking of the wilderness, he was speaking of preserving our humanity.

In the last analysis the issue was an issue of survival. We might survive as some monstrous mutation roaring through the forest in helmet and goggles, blind and deaf to everything around us with the illusion that we are swifter than eagles. Or, we might survive as those who come quietly and humbly to some point of listening and there contemplate the universe with awe.

But Sig Olson has gone on now to higher vistas. What of the future? I have been asked to speak words of celebration and hope. But these are not hopeful times. These are times of fear, times of conflict, times of oppression. These are mean spirited times when narrowed self-interest is made a virtue. And when that dimension of our humanity which Sig Olson struggled to preserve becomes an expendable commodity and all is seared with trade, bleared, smeared with toil and wears man's smudge and shares man's smell. The soil is bare now, nor can foot feel, being shod. Such is our impact on the world, such is our impact on ourselves.

If there is hope, it is the hope of the poet's own, immediate answer to his own, dreary image. And for all this, nature is never spent, there lives the dearest freshness, deep down things. This dearest freshness, deep down is inexorable. It cannot be held back.

REV. ROYAL SHEPARD

“THE DEAREST FRESHNESS”

Word came to me a few days ago of the death of a woman who, at one time in my life, had been a kind of second mother to me. And when I knew her, she lived on a farm in Nebraska. The day we first met was my first day in that part of the world or, indeed, in the Midwest. I had gone there from the East. And so, in the opening moments of our meeting, this woman spoke words that brought both the welcome and the challenge of this new place.

“A sunset over a corn field,” she said, “can be as beautiful as a sunset over the sea.” No corn field ever looked the same to me after that. And though it may be heresy to speak this way in this place, let me say that there are times in these wintry forests when I dream with longing of a wide corn field in mid-August, 160 or even 320 acres of deep surging green rippling in the wind and bright tossles gleaming. And I dream of the late sun going down behind.

There are people who give us an eye for things: lichens on the face of a rock, young ferns opening in the spring. And an ear for things: for the thunder of frost in the wood, for the laughter of loons. It is not only the new things that such people help us to see and to hear, not only the strange and the rare things. They bring to fresh

awareness things we have seen and heard many times before, but somehow never with true appreciation. There are people who help us to celebrate the world around us. Sigurd Olson was one of these and that is one of the reasons we celebrate his life.

Through Sig's own surpassing capacity to celebrate the world, his part of the world in particular, and through his choice gift of language, he led the rest of us into celebration. Some who are almost as familiar with his wilderness as was he were enabled by him to perceive that wilderness in fresh ways that led them deeper down into the life of things. And others who have never been within 1,000 miles of Ely have come through Sig's writings to share vicariously in his own experience and so to cherish more deeply their own part of the world.

Sigurd Olson did not use the word “God” very much. But I think he would have identified with the vision of Gerald Manley Hopkins in his tremendous sonnet that begins this way:

“The world is charged with the grandeur of
God. It will flame out like shining from
shook foil”

Sig Olson lived in that charged and shook foil world and he pointed to the possibility for the rest

“It makes no difference” wrote Sig Olson of the March winds, “it makes no difference if the ice is still thick on the lakes and the drifts are as deep as ever. When that something is in the wind, the entire situation is changed. Spring will come.” And so, in time, will our humanity.

SIG OLSON'S LEGACY

The funeral for Sig Olson was held last Saturday in Ely, Minnesota. The chill temperature at mid-day was 86 degrees below zero. Even so, people started coming for the one o'clock service. The extreme cold required sensible clothing, so felt-lined boots and thick woools were worn by many. For Sig's service, outdoor clothing seemed fitting anyway. He was a man of the North, and wore plaids and tweeds at pretty fancy affairs. Those woools were part of the image. They went with the man.

The modest church was filled to capacity. Reassuring scriptures were read and favorite hymns were sung and played.

Many of us knew that Malcolm McLean was going to say a few words. We knew that those words would be well chosen and well said.

Malcolm's eulogy to Sig was so *right* for that moment, so good, so uplifting—that, were I sure others would have joined me, I was tempted to start a standing ovation for both Sig and Malcolm.

The gist of what Malcolm said so eloquently was this:

Sig certainly showed us how to live. His love of wilderness everywhere, and especially in the northland, was so strong that he *made* us join him

in trying to save the wild places.

And wouldn't you know—now Sig has shown us how to die. No long maddening ordeal in a hospital bed trying to cheer up tearful visitors. Not for Sig! He died not only with his boots on, but *showshoes*, at the age of 82, hiking on a brisk winter day in his beloved north country.

Sig once told me about one of his mature canoeing pals—the Voyageurs, they called themselves—who a short time before, had bumped his head on a rock and drowned while running a rapid. Sig smiled at me and said, almost with envy in his voice, "What a way to go!"

I'm smiling right back, Sig, and saying it about *you*. What a way to go!

Wait! There's more to it.

As you know, the Sigurd Olson Environmental Institute was dedicated last May in a loving and beautiful ceremony.

Just two weeks ago, Sig finished proofing his last book, *Of Time and Place*. Sig was ready.

One week ago today, Sig and Elizabeth were snowshoeing. Elizabeth was having a problem with her bindings and went back home. And that's when it happened. Elizabeth was spared a very frightening moment when she couldn't have done anything to help. Sig *knew* that.

One more thing. Sig left a sheet of paper in his typewriter. On that sheet—and it's still in the typewriter—are these words: "A new adventure is coming up, and I know it's going to be a great one."

Last Sunday morning was calm, but it was 45 degrees below zero where we live a Moose Lake. Even so, I wanted to be out on snowshoes. I wasn't sure why. Perhaps to savor memories of special times with Sig, or to imagine he was there with me, and to guess what he might say at seeing a grouse flush from under the deep snow, or on hearing ravens call from up in the cold blue. The temperature eased up to about ten below, and I took off.

In honor of Sig, I explored. I crossed the lake and trudged through the forest to the old military stagecoach road (now just a trail through the woods), and visited a giant white pine that I know. I gave the pine a hug and thought how pleased Sig would have been to meet my friend. From that vantage point, on a steep slope dropping to a wild little lake, much like some in the BWCA wilderness, I saw pine tops I had missed on previous summer visits when they were hidden by the leaves. Searching one out, I angled down the slope and found myself in a lovely ravine that was new to me. Under protective balsams were deer tracks and beds, and I came to the huge black-barked pine that had beckoned me to this special place.

A long-tailed weasel had left its marks, two and two and two.

A large dead stub was being roughly carved by a pileated woodpecker. The fresh, yellow punky wood and new sawdust on the snow confirmed its frequent visits.

All of this said Sig to me. I could close my eyes and hear his soft baritone voice tying it all together in his rich prose that is close to being poetry.

Down by the tiny lake, on the edge of a floating bog, is a spindly fringe of black spruce. Sig has known these same trees far up on the Canadian and Alaskan taiga.

As I wrote these words, my thoughts of Sunday's walk with memories of Sig were so vivid, I was almost writing "we" and "us."

And that's good! So much of Sig is still here—in the Boundary Waters, Alaska and other wildernesses, in his books, in filmed documentaries and TV tapes, and of course right here in the Sigurd Olson Environmental Institute.

John Muir wrote these words, so fitting for Sig. "Let children walk with Nature, let them see beautiful blendings and communions of death and life, their joyous inseparable unity, as taught in the woods and meadows, plains and mountains and streams of our blessed star, and they will learn that death is stingless indeed, and as beautiful as life...All is divine harmony."*

Sig is still our leader and our inspiration, and many great things are still going to happen because Sig is Sig, and always will be.

*from *The Wilderness Days of John Muir*

And so he is gone
Another life over
and we pause
 and ponder at death's power
 to cause us
to reflect now on all life—
 its wonder,
 delight,
 struggle,
 challenge,
 its briefness.

The coldest of winds
 is raging tonight
dramatizing his death
affirming our aliveness
 with a biting sting
 that brings tears to our eyes.

But this was
 a well-lived life,
 rich and full
 ending in its own and
 proper way, at perhaps
 a most-fitting time.
And the rightness and beauty of that
 also brings tears to our eyes.

Poem by Nadine Blacklock
1-15-82

PERSONAL REFLECTIONS ON SIG'S LIFE

Indeed what a privilege it was to have known Sigurd Olson, and on three particularly moving occasions—in his home last winter in Ely, at the dedication of this beautiful Institute last spring, and now here today—to share through our music a part of the heritage and spirit Sig gave to us and to the voyageur era. My first encounter with Sigurd Olson was at the ripe age of 9 on the first of countless trips to Sig's beloved land of lakes, forests and streams known as the Quetico-Superior Country. It was late September and the canoe country was ablaze in all its fall splendor. We had come a long way, my grandparents and I—since leaving Lake One. We had heard the roar of Basswood Falls and had struggled—or rather my grandparents struggled over the historic portages of the old Voyageurs' Highway, and found ourselves the last day at the gateway to Lake Saganaga. As we paddled towards the open expanses of lake beyond Cache Bay the entire country became quiet—ominously quiet—as if we had entered sacred ground—a forbidden land where only the spirits of the past were allowed. The wind was deafly still, and the wake of our canoe all but shattered the mirrored surface of the lake. But then, in an instant, the spell was broken and giant thunderheads rolled in from the Northern

Light Country to the northwest—turning the lake into a confused and churning mass. The loons called madly and their flight was wild and uncontrolled. We had just enough time to scramble for our rain gear before the torrential downpour began—first an icy driving rain and then snow and sleet, whipped by the winds that howl as they only can on big Sag. We battled the wind and the cold the entire day—Sig's kind of day—one that tested the limits of the body and the spirit. And that night—when camp was safely made out of the wind and out of the storm—I felt for the first time the exultation and exhilaration that comes from a heightened sense of risk and adventure—and though I did not know it at the time, I know now that my life has never been the same since. And that night, around the camp fire, I also heard for the first time the poetic prose of Sigurd Olson. Appropriately, my grandparents read Farewell to Saganaga—the story of Sig's search for the ultimate wilderness lake. That lake was Saganaga, and when he paddled in it after making the same trip as we had made, he knew his search had ended. He goes on to describe his shock and disbelief when one day many years later—he heard that a road had come to Saganaga, his ultimate dream—and how he knew he must some-

day return and see for himself the changes that had come. Though I was only 9 at the time and had no idea of what the significance of wild areas such as the Quetico-Superior meant, nor the enormous part that this country would play in my life. I felt a deep sadness as he told in his story of how that once he had seen the lodge to which the road had come and had heard the shattering roar of an outboard motor—for him the eternal silence and solitude were broken forever—that it was farewell to the Saganaga he had known.

Here I stand—more than 10 years later and as I try to find a perspective on this man's place in hearts and in history, my thoughts return to my emotions of that first canoe trip and the first time I heard his words. Again the tears come—but for a different reason—for the loss of Saganaga and for the loss of Sigurd Olson—and we are all faced with a challenge that, more than ever, tests the limits of the body and spirit. For if the wild places that Sig fought a lifetime for die—then the true spirit of Sigurd Olson dies. If the dark day ever comes when our last great wilderness area is lost to the material value of board feet or kilowatt hours—it is only then that we would say farewell to Sigurd Olson. Sig more than any other person I know—had the ultimate faith that this dark day will never come for his ultimate faith was in us—those who would follow in his footsteps and continue to fight for the intangible values he stood for—timelessness, and silence and solitude and beauty and wonder. Sig stated this task which lies before us most beautifully in a recent documentary film done on him at his home and at his cabin on Listening Point. He walked up between a young pine sapling and a 300 year old red pine—one of the last remnants of the old virgin

timber, and said:

"A great many people, young people, come to see me and they ask, 'What is your hope for the world?' and I always answer them that the hope for the world is in you—you are the new generation—I am the old generation. And just like this little tree here, this is a sapling, and right beside it is one of these enormous red pines. This sapling epitomizes you and the hope of the world. So when you wonder how things are going, just remember that. You have your task to do, you have to carry on the battle to preserve such beautiful places as this, for the battle goes on endlessly. It's your task—you've got to see that you keep the flame alive, no matter what the obstacles. The whole world depends on you. The whole world depends on this little pine, in a sense, just as it at one time depended on these enormous trees."

That flame is indeed alive—it's alive inside and outside of this beautiful Institute—a permanent tribute to the environmental values Sigurd Olson so courageously stood for. It is alive in his books which captured in words the things we could only feel about, our home this beautiful Northland. But more than anything, that flame is alive in the hearts of each one of us here today and in the hearts of people in every watershed of this great country. In this way—Sig Olson will never die. He has left in his wake a generation of wilderness radicals to carry that torch. That is indeed a fine legacy for which this tired and threadbare old planet says—thanks—and so do we.

CHARLES STODDARD

REMARKS ON BEHALF OF THE WILDERNESS SOCIETY

As we gather today to commemorate the loss of a great American, and a good friend, Sig Olson, he would not have us dwell for long on the deep sorrow we feel over his passing. But, I'm sure he would prefer us to reflect for a few minutes on the meaning of his lifelong commitment to conservation and wilderness preservation.

Since the beginning of the twentieth century, two rival philosophies contended for the supremacy of the American mind. The dominant one, greedy, profited-motivated commercialism which extolled the inquisitive instinct and man's domination over nature. And the new, counter-veiling conservation philosophy which challenged the belief that mankind's role is that of a conquerer of the land community but is, instead, a citizen member of it.

Because Sig chose the latter philosophy and worked hard all of his life to achieve it, he stands apart from most of his generation. Unlike the pioneers of our past who went forth into the wilderness to exploit it, Sig was a pioneer of the future who went forth into the wilderness to save it for generations unborn. In an era of many villains and few heroes, Sig Olson inspired generations of young people with his spirit of selfless idealism; that working for the public good for the long future had greater rewards than fleeting materialism.

During the exciting years in Washington, dur-

ing the 60's when Stuart Udall was the Secretary of the Interior, I had the great fortune to serve with Sig under that Secretary with his far-sighted views on conservation. Sig went afield to examine potential lands for the national wilderness system, for wild and scenic rivers and new national parks. My job, to develop legislation and find appropriations to acquire those lands, was made more pleasurable for Sig's thorough and creative field reports.

The spirit and vision of Sig Olson must live on today, tomorrow and forever. In this last gasp of greed now engulfing Washington, the exploiters are once more in the saddle seeking to rip apart the very areas Sig sought to save.

Sig's spirit lives on in a strong Wilderness Society over which he presided for several terms. And it is now doing battle on the conservation front lines to save the same wilderness areas from another round of destruction. Sig knew, and The Wilderness Society is one of his legacies, that eternal vigilance is not only the price of liberty but the requirement of sound conservation policy.

If ever it can be said that a man left his mark on the land, Sig Olson is that man. His spirit will continue to inspire future generations to preserve those values and ideals which Sig held so high.

HIGHLIGHTS OF AN ADVENTUROUS LIFE

- 1899 Born in Chicago, Illinois
- 1905 Moved to Northern Wisconsin
- 1916 Graduated from Ashland High School
- 1916-1918 Student at Northland College
- 1918 U.S. Army service
- 1921 Married Elizabeth Dorothy Urenholdt
- 1922 Embarked on canoe expeditions in Quetico-Superior wilderness
- 1922-1935 Head of Biology Department, Ely Junior College
- 1923 Bachelor of Science Degree, University of Wisconsin
- 1923 Sigurd Thorn Olson born
- 1925 Robert Keith Olson born
- 1931 Master of Science Degree, University of Illinois
- 1935-1945 Dean, Ely Junior College
- 1945-1946 American Army University, Shrivenham, England; Germany; France; Italy; Austria
- 1947 Consultant, Izaak Walton League of America
- 1950 Member, National Advisory Board of Parks, Monuments, Historic Sites
- 1956 *The Singing Wilderness* recreated journeys in the Quetico-Superior wilderness country
- 1958 *Listening Point* recounts the teachings of a place in the Quetico-Superior
- 1960-1966 Member, Secretary of Interior's Advisory Committee
- 1961 Honorary Doctor of Humane Letters, Hamline University
- 1961 Honorary Doctor of Science, Northland College
- 1961 *The Lonely Land* describing canoe expeditions in Northern Canada
- 1962 Consultant to the Director, National Park Service
- 1963 Honorary Doctor of Science, Macalester College
- 1963 Hall of Fame, Izaak Walton League of America
- 1967-1971 President, The Wilderness Society
- 1969 *The Hidden Forest* with Les Blacklock
- 1969 *Open Horizons* (autobiographical)
- 1972 *Wilderness Days* a seasonal perspective of the Quetico-Superior wilderness
- 1974 Burroughs Medal received for *Wilderness Days*, John Burroughs Memorial Association
- 1976 *Reflections from the North Country* explores the beauty of wilderness
- 1979 Honorary Doctor of Humane Letters, University of Minnesota
- 1979 Honorary Doctorate, Beloit College
- 1981 Dedication of Sigurd Olson Environmental Institute building at Northland College
- 1981 Sigurd Olson Day proclaimed (May 9)
- 1981 Robert Marshall Award, The Wilderness Society