E. M. DAHLBERG

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for the Wisconsin Conservation Hall of Fame
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I am pleased and proud that you have chosen to honor E. M. Dahlberg today. He was my father. I wish my mother and two brothers, Burt and John, were still alive to share my joy and pride. They would have deeply appreciated your recognition of Dad's energetic advocacy of conservation principles.

The Wisconsin Conservation Hall of Fame has assembled an excellent report of my father's accomplishments. I don't wish to repeat that information. Instead, I would like to give you a more personal picture of E. M. Dahlberg.

Dad's entire life centered on his concern for the environment. He made conservation the focus of the biology classes he taught at Ladysmith High School. From his nursery out on Highway 8 he lined the streets of Ladysmith with trees and landscaped its parks. He maintained a considerable amount of wooded land where he prudently harvested fence posts, lumber and Christmas trees not to mention blueberries, blackberries, gooseberries—whatever he figured his wife could use for one of her excellent pies.

These undertakings kept him busy year around from dawn to dark. In the evening, this man who had prepared himself to become an English teacher (but instead taught science classes almost entirely) could be heard pecking away at his old Underwood, producing a textbook, articles and another book which he almost finished. He also found time to attend meetings of civic groups in some way connected to conservation.

As a high school teacher and principal, he demanded much of both himself and his students. He was strict but always fair, as I believe the best teachers are.

Perhaps the educational accomplishment of which he was proudest was the Ladysmith High School Forest. It served as a laboratory for students in Dad's biology classes to learn how to nurture a natural landscape and to study the flora and fauna of northern Wisconsin. When I was in high school in the forties, girls were not included in the field trips to the school forest. Today, Title IX would preclude this discrimination. However, having since taught high school students, I can understand Dad's reluctance to be responsible for teenage boys and girls romping together in the woods. Actually, he was before his time in his beliefs about equity for women.

In his textbook, *Conservation of Renewable Resources,* Dad wrote, "No conservation is more important to mankind than the conservation of human resources." This belief was reflected in his concern that every youth in the Ladysmith area complete their secondary education. Dad's own high school experience had been fitful and much of it necessitated his living away from his family, but he had been determined to graduate. He completed high school at the Northland Academy in Ashland and went on to college there. An

added impetus to remain at Northland may have been Stella Johnson, also a student there who he would later marry.

In the fifties, I was doing graduate work at the University of Southern California. One day my husband and I sat down to eat lunch in the crowded commons. Another graduate student bearing a cafeteria tray asked if he could join us. We got to talking as people do under such circumstances and I was surprised to learn that he had attended Ladysmith High School. He told me that he had been adopted by a family living on a farm some distance from Ladysmith. In cold weather, he often had no way to get to school. That was before yellow school buses were a familiar sight trundling across the countryside. When Dad found out why the boy was so often absent, he simply got up earlier and drove out to the farm and brought him to school. You could say he took a hands-on approach to conserving human resources.

Dad felt strongly about war. The United States had not yet entered World War II when he wrote, "No activity in the whole history of civilization is so completely contrary to every principle of sound conservation as is human warfare." Within a few years, both his sons were on battlefronts. Every night, Dad hunched before the radio listening to the war communiqués. When both boys returned uninjured, it was a time of great joy.

During the war years, Dad took on a variety of extra jobs to support the war effort. One such task for which I am certain he was not remunerated was the teaching of a class in physics before school began in the morning. Boys were being drafted then upon turning eighteen. If they were enrolled in a class when drafted, they were to be given full credit. Dad's before school students were boys who needed the science credit for college entrance but would be drafted before the second semester began.

A few years ago I was talking to one of those boys. He had just retired from a very successful career in education. He told me that by June of 1944 he was in the thick of the war in Europe. One day he received a package from my father. It was his high school yearbook. I suppose Dad sent yearbooks to all the boys who had been drafted before finishing their senior year.

Dad never hesitated to enter the political fray to defend his stands about preservation of the environment. That his viewpoints were not always popular did not deter him. When he fought against construction of the Little Falls dam on the Flambeau River, he was undaunted by the ridicule of the press. When the fight was lost, he commissioned a painting of Little Falls by Joan Beringer Pripps. That painting hung in my parents' home until Mother passed away. Then my brother, John, arranged for it to be given to Ladysmith High School where I hope it still hangs to remind today's students of the wild beauty that once was there.

All these undertakings left little time for leisure. But when Dad could get away, he always seemed most comfortable at Slabshack, a camp he and his sons built on the Thornapple River.

Shortly before my parents married, Dad bought forty acres not far from Ladysmith with frontage on the Thornapple. They decided to honeymoon there during the summer before Dad began teaching in Ladysmith. The forty acres was wild land—no buildings, no access road. The only sensible way to their land was clearly by water. Visualize this young couple, their canoe loaded with gear and towing planks for a tent floor, paddling down a fast river and struggling past the frequent obstructions of fallen trees. My mother often spoke of that adventurous summer. They camped just above a beaver dam across a small ravine from where Slabshack was later built. Wild roses flourished at their honeymoon site.

One summer a fire started not far from Slabshack. Dad and Burt, his oldest son, drove out to Slabshack early that evening to check on road work being done nearby. They discovered the fire. There was no time to get help; the fire was too close. Fortunately, several fire cans were kept at Slabshack. These were water tanks that could be strapped on one's back with a short hose and spray head attached. When full, they were very heavy. With this meager and awkward equipment, Dad and Burt held the fire at bay until midnight. Then rain began to fall. Slabshack was saved.

In the summer, my parents spent as much time as possible at Slabshack and Dad often snow shoed there in the winter. In summer, it was an idyllic place, with tiger lilies bobbing by the kitchen door and the water rippling over the rocks. Dad relaxed there, fishing in his kayak or watching deer come down to the water at sunset.

In his later years, Dad remained remarkably active despite poor health. He ran his nursery, maintained his woodlots, and, on days too inclement to be outside, worked on, and nearly completed, a book about his experiences in the north woods and his thoughts on conservation.

As my parents became increasingly frail, visits to the Thornapple River became difficult. However, Dad retained his lifelong habit of observing nature. Mother kept records of the many birds they saw during the different seasons on their large lawn overlooking the Flambeau River in Ladysmith. Their diaries reveal the pleasure they took in almost daily walks, winter and summer, through the wooded land that Dad had carefully conserved behind his nursery. The following entry is typical:

March 8. On our walk over the hill and through the tamaracks, we saw a lone porcupine high up in a big elm tree. This could be the last one we will see so close to the nursery office and boys with guns.

March 9. "Porky" still in the same elm but higher up. We left assorted vegetables at the foot of the tree which we hope he will appreciate.

The diary records their daily observations of the porcupine, until finally—

March 25. After 18 days in the elm tree, porcupine finally came down. There was some indication of porcupine wisdom in that the snow was gone and there was no way we could track him. Good luck, old boy.

Thank you again for your tribute to E. M. Dahlberg. The efforts of the Wisconsin Conservation Hall of Fame will help to keep alive in Wisconsin's schools my father's concern for the environment and his courage in defending the wild things.