

Forest Home Memoirs by Randy Scott Little



Memoirs are a very personal and evocative way to teach history. Commonplace details of daily life resonate with all of us, regardless of our background. The History Center has recently been given a collection of essays by Randolph (Randy) Scott Little, “On Childhood in Old Forest Home.” They relate the story of Randy’s life growing up during the mid-20th century in one of Tompkins County’s most picturesque neighborhoods. Forest Home, nestled around Fall Creek near the Cornell University campus, is today a lovely little bedroom community with charming homes along winding

and hilly streets. But in the middle years of the last century it was a small enclave surrounded by farm land and a growing university.

“Seventy-five years ago I lived in a garage apartment on Warren Road. The upper level was a two-car garage; downstairs was a cozy living space. It overlooked a small orchard behind the Knox house on Forest Home Drive. In May the apple blossoms were bountiful and beautiful. My father was the coach of swimming at Cornell and my mother was a statistician in the College of Agriculture.... A few years later...we moved to the top of the hill at 120 Warren Road. I got my own bedroom and in the evening enjoyed listening to ‘The Lone Ranger’ on the radio with a fire in the fireplace, while my parents read the Ithaca Journal and tended to the day’s mail.”

Randy does more than relate the details of his childhood: He brings to life the natural world of Fall Creek and the surrounding forest that became his playground. “The back yard had a small flat area, that rapidly sloped downward to the woods.... Those woods had overgrown an old apple orchard and contained a mixture of other kinds of trees. The old apple trees were quite climbable, as was one white pine. These provided good learning experiences in many regards. It is easier to climb up that to climb back down.” “Summer brought a whole new realm of possibilities....I had learned to swim and respect water at an early age, so Fall Creek from just above the dam by the lower bridge all the way up to Flat Rock was my summer playground. Crayfish and hellgrammites found by turning over rocks in shallow water made, I thought, good presents for my father the fisherman.”

Cornell University and all its marvels also engaged this inquisitive youngster, and kindly faculty and staff, including legendary ornithologist Arthur (Doc) Allen allowed him to help with mundane tasks in the College of Agriculture buildings. The old Warren farm to the north on Warren Road where the Equine Research Center is today was also part of his domain. What became a lifelong love of birds was born in these early experiences and explorations, and the boy hunting for birds’ nests has since become the man who teaches a series of classes on bird sounds for the New Jersey Audubon Society.

These charming essays can be read in our Forest Home Collection in The History Center Research Library Tuesdays, Thursdays, and Saturdays, from 11:00 to 5:00.