



The author's son, Carson, at Indian Creek.

Memory's Eye

I'm sitting in the drawing room of an old farmhouse in Butler County, Ohio. It's raining outside; a slow steady drizzle of fat drops patter the trees outside my window. The crepuscular light is flat, but it carries a pleasant platinum quality. This two-story sits on a bench of land, rising over Indian Creek. Low hills rim the view. A broad crescent-shaped neck of land, studded with corn stubble below and bordered by a long gravel driveway has sent my mind a' meandering. I think of the past, and wonder about the future.

An oak-maple forest cover, and even crops of beans and corn, could belie the view of what I see this morning. The sodden soil in this quickly changing light shows not just a level piece of prime farm field at rest. Instead, I can make out three former creek channels on this ranging ground. Creeks want to wander side to side. By that nature they are not fixed. But I think we come to think of the spots of time—the moments that make memories—as fixed. They lend fixity to our existence.

This plot of ground is fixed in an American story. The spigot to settlement was open after the Shawnee-Miami Indian “threat” was removed. A young family, the Allhands, settled here. They built a mill on Indian Creek. They cooked sugar from the maples. They buried the first white child in the township—a child scalded in the sugar house in 1803. He was laid to rest in a plot that eventually was the final resting place of 32 others. But like the Indian mounds that have melted in the miasma, the cemetery has been lost in the press of time. No one knows where it's located, but it is near this house.

Lore has it that you'll find large stones nearby where two horse thieves once stood—with nooses around their necks—as they took their last breaths in 1815. They'd thieved along the creek. Another “last” happened here that same year; the last cougar was killed, a bounty on its head. The county paid one dollar for the ears from a dead cougar.

Wilderness yielded to the plow, the plow yields to the subdivision, but only where conservation hasn't taken hold. Fortunately, a good chunk of lands along Indian Creek are saved because of the Three Valley Conservation Trust. And I sit this rainy morning, only a visitor here in the place where I grew up. In this still moment gray with rain, I remember Indian Creek as I never saw it, and as I lived it. Memory lends fixity, knowing that in a pleasant way tomorrow is a collection of all its yesterdays. 🍁

CRAIG SPRINGER GREW UP IN OHIO, BECAME A WRITER, ADOPTED THE WEST AS HIS NEW HOME, BUT REMAINS LOYAL TO THE THREE VALLEY CONSERVATION TRUST BACK IN OHIO.