

## Sound of Freedom

by Martin “Red” Fredricks

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*“For long spells they would fly in silence, but most often they maintained a noisy communication, arguing, protesting, exulting; at night especially they uttered cries which echoed forever in the memories of men who heard them drifting down through the frosty air of autumn.” – from “Chesapeake, Voyage Eight: 1822,” by James A. Michener*



For the past two weeks or so I have been waking at night with shivers running up and down my spine. These shivers have little to do with the weather, although it has been cold lately.

I’m a fairly light sleeper, one of those people who seldom wakes up without knowing what day it is and what needs to be done before the day is done.

In the past two-and-a-half weeks a faint but invigorating sound has drawn me out of dreamland and into the yard before trying to get back to sleep. Great writers have tried to capture the awe-inspiring quality which this sound can have on humans. It is the sound of freedom and struggle and the strength to overcome.

It is the sound of the southbound geese, calling out to one another in the moonlight as they continue their fall migration. It is a sound which brings to the surface in me a desire to fly, to be free of all the earthly worries to which we humans are bound.

I remember being in college, lost in the study of Russian history, worried about an exam I had the next day, the homework I needed to accomplish regardless of a full weekend at work and a phone bill that needed paying. I was at my desk, completely absorbed in a textbook, when a faint sound drifted through the slightly open window.

My head came up and I started to rise out of my chair. Then I thought better of it, thinking the traffic that screeched past on the street in front of my house would drown out that sound. I figured it was my imagination. I returned to Trotsky and Lenin and the first Russian Revolution of this century.

A few minutes later I heard the sound again, this time more distinct, and I knew I wasn’t hearing things. I leaped out of my chair and started searching under piles of test-week dirty laundry for some shoes, any shoes. Finally I realized I didn’t

have time to waste on shoes and ran out the door into the back yard in my bare feet.

I could still hear the geese but couldn't see them. My yard in Fargo was squashed between two other houses and a one-story garage. I scaled the garage in a matter of seconds, hoping I wouldn't be too late.

As I reached the top, I was greeted by 30 greater Canadian geese, Honkers, flying across the backdrop of a splendid North Dakota autumn sunset of reds, pinks, oranges and blues. I laughed exultantly and waved a clinched fist at the squawking birds, hoping they might raise a call for me.

I watched as they flew out of sight, a bare-footed grinning idiot, thinking only of the strength it must take to fly thousands of miles and the freedom one must have to do so. And, for the thousandth time, I wished I was one of them.

They left me there on top of a crumbling garage with a useless wish, cursing myself for not bringing my camera. I laughed again and climbed back down to the yard and my trivial problems.

I didn't return to the Russian Revolution. The geese had started my blood pumping and I couldn't concentrate. I spent the rest of the evening writing and thinking about other good memories the geese have given me over the years. I went to bed early, completely happy and relaxed. I took the exam the next day, and did better than I probably would have if I had stressed over the books all night.

I am a hunter, but that fact has little bearing on the love I have for the geese and the joyous feeling they give me each time they lure me out of sleep or self concern.

They remind me that we live in a state where the big birds can stop to rest and refuel, and the fact that they fly thousands of miles is a reminder that we can do anything if we have the determination and strength to try.

Except fly, of course.

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