

# Reflections by the Pond

THE WRITINGS OF DAVID S LAMPEL



COLD,  
STARVING,  
& LOST

"Come to Me, all who are weary  
and heavy-laden, and I will give  
you rest. Take My yoke upon  
you and learn from Me, for I am  
gentle and humble in heart,  
and you will find rest for your  
souls. For My yoke is easy and  
My burden is light."

*Matthew 11:28-30*



# A Black Shadow Follows Us Home

**I**t all began one Sunday morning a few weeks ago. Stopping to collect our mail after church, we spied something dark moving in the brush across the road from our mailbox. Absent any response to our call, we gave up, only to discover the jet-black cat under our deck the following morning.

We placed a bowl of food out on the step and the cat inhaled the contents without pause. With the bowl filled again that evening, the response was repeated. Not surprisingly, the cat had arrived starved.

Temperatures were bitterly cold, but there is nominal shelter back under the close confines where the soil rises to meet the structure of the deck. And the cat was not asking to come inside; to the contrary, it was enthusiastically hissing at the hand that was feeding it.

We have established a pattern over the last thirty years—indeed, for the span of our married life—of welcoming into our home a succession of stray cats. Feline is not the sole species to receive our solace, but it is the only species invited inside to join the family.

We periodically receive groundhogs (or woodchucks) who have taken up residence somewhere around or under our deck (we assign them the name Woody for the duration) and are frequently visited by raccoons—not the small, cute types one sees in commercials, but the huge, mother-lode beasties large enough to stop a small train.

Both of these species are made welcome so long as they are reasonably well-behaved, an arrangement that typically lasts less than twenty-four hours.

And, of course, there are the myriad deer that pass through, some even dwelling with us for a while. We welcome them year-round, in the spring welcome their fawns, and, over the winter, feed them along with the birds.

For us, however, cats are a special category, for they are not meant to be wild, and if they are, the situation is not one of their choosing. We reserve a special malice toward those who willfully dispose of their unwanted cats out in the country; given the opportunity, I would strip these miscreants naked and drop them onto a floating iceberg in the Antarctic, to see how *they* like

it. The modern house or even barn cat is not a miniature lion or tiger, but a feline bred to be dependent on the nutrients and enzymes in cat food. Even if they do manage to survive in the wild, they will remain unhealthy, sickly, and no doubt carrying around with them a belly full of worms. Those who do survive the summer and autumn, often do not survive the winter.

Like a welcome yellow flame the Spirit of God warms us against the cold of this world. Oh, we don't very often think of this habitation in terms of temperature; it just is, it is the place of our birth and, if only for the moment, home. But it is indeed cold. It is hard, brutally hard. It forces on those of us

“I will ask the Father, and He will give you another Helper, that He may be with you forever; that is the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it does not see Him or know Him, but you know Him because He abides with you and will be in you.”

*John 14:16-17*

who must daily toil in it the necessity of building up layers of insulation, of protection against its ways.

Just as extremities lose feeling in the bitter winter, we who must deal with the bitter world suffer a diminishing of the senses. But the Spirit can revive those senses, broadening their scope to embrace even things unseen, the things of the spirit, and the things

of an unseen God.

This is a hard, cold world, and if we survive it by adapting to it, we will ultimately go down with it. We will die an earthly and earthy kind of death.

But the Holy Spirit lifts us out of that frigid contemplation, warming us with His flame, offering us hope and promise.

Not death, but life. ❧

## Shadow Finds Shelter

**A**t long last **Shadow**—for that is now his name, not because of his sleek black coat, but because it is his habit to follow along at one’s side—was moved into the garage in anticipation of sub-zero temperatures. But he was not yet comfortable with his surroundings, for every night he would seek out and find a most heretofore unimaginable hiding place, where he would silently secrete himself so successfully that it would take us hours to find him. It was also during this period when we discovered that his front paws had been declawed—a condition that rendered his earlier homelessness even more dire, even more perilous. For a declawed cat has little protection against foes other than flight, and has a distinct handicap when feeding in the wild.

No wonder he was so starved when he found us. (Now to the disrobing and icy exile for his previous owners I would add the surgical removal of their fingernails.)

Many of us think we are satisfied with the status quo. Life is good—what more could there be? But aren’t we *all* starving? Aren’t we all looking for more than what we have, more than what we know? Some of us are even looking for something more than what we *are*.

Born in each person is a yearning for a better situation, for this world has not sufficient sustenance for the human spirit. Just as a homeless person or animal will no doubt have an empty belly, so too in every person born of woman there dwells an emptiness that is God-shaped. The first man, Adam, was made with this space filled to overflowing, since, for a while, he enjoyed a unique and intimate fellowship with God. Everyone born after the first family’s fall, however, was born with that space aching empty.

Many of us do not know why we are starving. We just know there is something missing from our life.

“He humbled you and let you be hungry, and fed you with manna which you did not know, nor did your fathers know, that He might make you understand that man does not live by bread alone, but man lives by everything that proceeds out of the mouth of the LORD.”

*Deuteronomy 8:3*

Here marks the genius of our God. He does not stop with salvation, that gracious gift of eternal life with Him through Christ Jesus. No, in the meantime, until the moment we cross over the threshold of heaven, the believer has even his present life filled with God. In that once-vacant space shaped perfectly for deity now resides, permanently, God's Holy Spirit, who establishes an unbreakable connection with Father and Son.

And we need never be hungry again—except for the comforting hunger of wanting even more of Him.

Shadow came from people who either cast him off, not caring that he might starve to death, or at least people who did not bother to look for him once he had left on his own.

The child of God need never fear that situation. He will never be cast off, never abandoned, and never at risk of starving to death. ❧

## No Longer Lost

**H**ow terrible it must be for a domestic animal—any animal—to be thrown out of home and hearth like just another piece of trash. And in the dead of winter, no less. You have had a warm home in which to live, perhaps as one of the family; you were well-fed, and enjoyed the affection of at least some in the household.

Now you are abandoned to snow, freezing wind, and sub-zero temperatures.

Shadow had had his front claws removed, which meant he had been a house cat, and he had been neutered. Thus he was no stray, and certainly not a feral cat. Yet here he was, alone, cold, starving, and lost. No one was looking for him; no ads were placed in the local paper; no one came knocking on our door looking for their pet; the local animal rescue establishment had not been alerted.

Lost, with no one looking for him.

*I was lost, but Jesus found me,  
Found the sheep that went astray,  
Threw His loving arms around me,  
Drew me back into His way.  
Yes, I'll sing the wondrous story  
Of the Christ who died for me,  
Sing it with the saints in glory,  
Gathered by the crystal sea.*

Francis H. Rowley

Being lost is a condition built into the framework of humanity, for we are each of us born that way. Being lost means that you are not where you would rather be, but it also means, more often than not, that no one on earth is looking for you, for few care. You are a solitary cork floating and bobbing on the surface of an ocean, being moved about by an anonymous, faceless current. Fabulously wealthy Wall Street lawyers can be lost. Happily married men and women can be lost. Truck drivers, electricians, beauticians, preachers, professors, ditch diggers, plumbers, carpenters, rich and poor alike—all can be lost. For being lost is a condition that shares no other required template.

"Where do I fit in?" "What is the meaning of life?" "Why am I here?" These are the pleas, the yearnings of the lost.

The pity, the unbearable tragedy, is that so many who are lost haven't a clue that they

are, for most cannot admit to that condition until it is past. Shadow knew he was lost; everything familiar to him was suddenly gone. But does the one who knows nothing beyond this fallen earth realize he is adrift? Does the one who thinks this is all there is know what he is missing? Does the one who considers this earth home even think to look elsewhere?

We are born lost, and we do not—*cannot*—find our way out of that condition. If we, as the foundering cork in an endless sea, begin to sink, there is no hope for us save the rescuing arm thrust beneath the waves to pull us to safety. Contrary to popular thought, the lost neither look for or find God; He finds them. The lost do not “seek” God; He seeks them.

God has looked down from heaven  
upon the sons of men  
To see if there is anyone who understands,  
Who seeks after God.  
Every one of them has turned aside;  
together they have become  
corrupt;

There is no one who does good, not even one.

*Psalm 53:2-3*

Just as Shadow was called out of his lost condition by the calling of a friendly, inviting voice, those who are lost are called out of that condition by the gracious voice of God.

But we should always give thanks to God for you, brethren beloved by the Lord, because God has chosen you from the beginning for salvation through sanctification by the Spirit and faith in the truth. It was for this He called you through our gospel, that you may gain the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ.

*2 Thessalonians 2:13-14*

We all enter this world cold, hungry, and lost. The good news is that there *is* someone who cares. He is good, He is kind, and He is forgiving. We need only answer when He calls out to us, inviting us into His home. ☩

