



Autumn Leaves

When autumn comes and the trees start to lose their leaves, something magical happens just outside my bedroom window. The world changes. A curtain goes up and a drama begins.

In one way, our small town in northern Wisconsin is much like the major cities in the world.

You see, our town also straddles a river. It's not the Thames or the Danube or the Rhine or the Seine, but it's our river and it speaks to us every single day.

Our town bridges that river with as much confidence as London, Budapest or Paris. And we have one big advantage that big-city folks don't have; everyone in [Ladysmith](#) lives within walking distance of our beautiful [Flambeau River](#) named by French explorers and trappers. Our river park even has chain-saw sculpture.

Now here's my problem, my puzzle, my dilemma. From my bedroom window, only during this time of year when autumn gives a good-night kiss to sleepy trees and dense leaves try their wings but fail to fly and always fall. Just then, in autumn, every year, I can see the Flambeau River beyond the trees. And it is grand!



It is something to look forward to. Yes, the leaves are leaving for a while. Yes, the frosty days and freezing nights are just an hour or two away. Yes, the summer sun-birds are replaced by chickadees and juncos. But there it is, meandering from north to south, reminding folks of the force and power of water, showing us that we are in its deep debt. There it is, and, I can see it from my bedroom window through the undressed branches. It tells its story to anyone who will listen and wonder.

It speaks of a sawmill north of town where work was dangerous and grueling. It speaks of a time when logs drifted downstream, directed by men and currents to destinations known only to builders and carpenters. It speaks of human efforts to capture power and then send it into homes for easy light and easy heat. It speaks of joy and adventure, of camping trips, of floods and droughts, of river banks where animal neighbors carve their homes. It reminds me always that our lives are

measured by two sets of values; like the river, we must cope with flux and change.

When autumn arrives and I can again see the Flambeau from my bedroom window, it's time for me to inventory some basic blessings. It's time to look through the leafless trees and see what's beyond the forest.