

A TRIBUTE TO ALVENA SCHNELL, MONDAY, 26 OCTOBER 1992

J. FRANK ROY, 650 Costigan Way, Saskatoon, Saskatchewan. S7J 3R2

Alvena's family asked me to say a few words on behalf of her close friends and associates in the Saskatchewan and Saskatoon Natural History Societies, and, in particular, the Golden Eagles, a group of seniors within the local society with whom she shared her love of nature. When she was with the Eagles, whose weekly outings take them all around the Saskatoon area and across much of Saskatchewan, Alvena was happy. She had found a compatible group, not only interested in birds and flowers and all life outdoors, but people who loved fun and good conversation, and frequent coffee stops; and, among them, she found other devotees of music, literature, and the CBC.

Apart from a rather specialized interest in botany, Alvena was a generalist. She knew a little about almost everything, but didn't worry if she couldn't identify a particular sparrow with absolute certainty; "I'll leave that to the experts," she'd say with a chuckle. What mattered to Alvena was the close look: she loved colour and form and scent. I have a lovely photograph of her and Paul Coutu, squatting on the ground together, bent over, looking at an ant (or was it a grain of sand?) with inverted binoculars (they magnify that way, you know).

Alvena was a veteran attender of conferences, summer meets and annual meetings. She was proud of the fact that she had missed only two of

the 21 Canadian Nature Federation Conferences, held every year in a different province. She attended the conference in 1992 in Quebec City; four years ago she was interviewed and photographed by the local press in Yellowknife, where she was the oldest delegate in attendance (and held that honour in each year following). Just a few days before her death she attended the annual meeting of the Saskatchewan Natural History Society in Yorkton. Spartan in her personal living, she was as generous as she could be in her support of organizations and institutions in which she believed, among them Grace-Westminster United Church, the Saskatoon Symphony, the University of Saskatchewan, the Mendel Art Gallery, and the Meevasin Valley Authority where she had recently become a "Friend of the Valley."

As Muriel Bremner said to me in conversation, Alvena was unique: tiny, seemingly frail, but tough as a Mexican carrot as my father used to say, unorthodox in some ways, self-effacing, witty, determined (she remained deaf to our suggestions that she should wear warmer clothes on our winter outings), she loved and was loved. An inveterate storyteller, she needed time because she never omitted a detail and she qualified nearly every assertion she made. And yet, that same lady was mistress of quick retort, often a poetic or Biblical quotation that really hit home.

On a personal note, Alvena and I often shared our interests in literature, art and music. Like most of the people of her generation and for a couple of generations after, we had been nurtured on Shakespeare and the great British poets. I'd like to conclude with a little poem that Alvena knew and which, I think, tells us something about her attitude to life:

"Leisure" by W. H. Davies.

What is this life, full of care,
We have no time to stand and stare.

No time to stand beneath the boughs
And stare as long as sheep or cows.

No time to see, when woods we
pass,
Where squirrels hide their nuts in
grass.

No time to see, in broad daylight.
Streams full of stars, like skies at
night.

No time to turn at Beauty's glance,
And watch her feet, how they can
dance.

No time to wait till her mouth can
Enrich that smile her eyes began.

A poor life this if, full of care,
We have not time to stand and stare.

Alvena took the time.



Prairie Crocus (Anemone patens)

Frank A. Switzer