

## *Foreword*

By Debbie S. Newman

When I sat down to begin reading *Side Channels*, I decided to put on some Native American flute music. Rock n' roll music would have been too distracting from the task at hand. But as the words of the essays began to unfold in front of me, what I had chosen for some "background" music suddenly seemed like it was made for the book. Or was the book made for the music? Whichever, it was like milk and cookies, a perfect match of flavors and textures. From the beginning, Tom Lerczak managed to transport me with him on an odyssey of sorts, rich in the infinite *mélange* of a natural world many people hardly know. Like much Native American music, adventures in this book evoke a strong sense of place that is transcendent of time and space. Tom illustrates that there are many parts to any story, showing us a river or landscape today, and then taking us to that same place 40 years ago, or 10,000 years ago; viewing that river from underwater as would a fish, and then from above through the eyes of an eagle. After reading these stories, you will be certain in the back of your mind that you've actually visited these places.

I was delighted when Tom asked me to write a foreword for his book. I've long been familiar with his writing. He first began refining his naturalist writing skills when I was editing *Illinois Audubon* magazine for the Illinois Audubon Society. Tom sent me articles with a deep sense of the details found in nature—described from an astute eye. As Tom polished his workmanship, these details showed that he is a true student of the wild.

Not that this was a surprise to me.

I first met Tom through my husband, Barry Newman, whom Tom worked with at the Illinois Natural History Survey. We quickly became good friends, spending time together on shared passions such as bird watching. It was here that I saw Tom's penchant for observing the details of nature. Me being sometimes a rather impatient person, I was always reminded by accompanying Tom that patience and quiet observation—nearly a lost art in our world today—are the true keys to experiencing the finer details of nature, and are essential to painting the word-pictures found in this book of essays.

Tom and I were fortunate enough to commence working for the Illinois Nature Preserves Commission simultaneously in the 1990s. Working for the Commission is a pleasure, because it is an adventure. Tom shares in this book what we both know as Commission staff: living a life of loving nature leads to one adventure after another, whether in the company of an old oak friend or a cadre of winged companions, or atop an ancient, grass-covered bluff. I invite you to join these adventures through Tom's words. Read, and enjoy!

Debbie S. Newman

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*Bend in the River*