



THE QUIET UNDER THE CROW'S WINGS

WORDS & PHOTOS BY CAROLYN A. SURRICK

I am one of them. One of the people from the East, one of those damn city folk who come to a small town, meet a couple of people, buy a piece of land, build a house, and get on a plane a couple of times a year to visit. Then leave when the first snow comes.

And I know what you think of me. Because I walked into the Outdoor Store just in time to hear Rex let off a little steam about “those people who

come out here and buy some property and don't stay all year round, who don't contribute to community, who aren't here when things get hard, whose kids don't even go to school here, and there they go putting up houses that aren't even lived in half the time that just clutter up the valley.”

I heard what he said and I knew what he meant—people like me don't belong here. That was 10 years ago and I haven't forgotten a word.



“I wanted to look out the window and see mountains I felt like I could touch. After 10 years of looking all over the West, I discovered Pinedale, Wyo. The first piece of land I looked at was about 30 miles from town. A moose was standing in the oxbow of the river.”

My life isn't like yours. I am a musician and my life is about airports, with planes that don't leave or arrive on time, and luggage that's somewhere you aren't. It's a series of hotels in the center of a city with cabs and buses that run all night, freeways and rental cars, concert halls that are full of people who all want to meet you and talk about anything and everything, and traffic, lots of traffic. There's voice mail, e-mail, notes from the theater managers left at the front desk. Those and blinking lights on the phone when you get to your room because someone missed his plane, someone left her music in Dallas, or someone at home can't find his homework.

I wanted a place to go to that wasn't on either coast. I wanted a place without traffic, crowds or a megaplex with 17 theaters that only show five different movies. I wanted to look out the window and see mountains I felt like I could touch. I needed something I could afford.

I was not hopeful. After 10 years of looking all over the West, I discovered Pinedale, Wyo. The first piece of land I looked at was about 30 miles from town. A moose was standing in the oxbow of the river. It was so quiet I could hear the air beneath a crow's wings, and the sound of the wind.

It cost more than I had planned. At that point, I wasn't touring regularly and had only released three CDs. I was not a great loan prospect. I worried when I got to the bank on Thursday how things would turn out. Mr. Delgado handed me a loan application.

I asked if he wanted to see my tax returns.

“Nope.”

I asked him if he wanted any of the CDs or reviews or press clippings.

“Nope.”

I asked him if he wanted any of the documentation for the instruments I owned.

“Nope. Come in and play for me tomorrow morning at 10 and we'll see if we will be able to do something for you.”

The next morning I played for about 15 minutes, explained the history of the rare instrument I was holding, and had the loan approved on Tuesday. From there I went over to my realtor's office and played for her friends and colleagues. That was how Pinedale was introduced to the glories of the viola da gamba, an instrument that went out of style in 1750. That was how I got a loan that no bank on the East Coast would have given me. Ever.

And now there's a house that looks out on the mountains beside the oxbow. I know I don't

belong. I am a visitor. But this country gives me strength when I am too tired to move. The quiet allows a place in my head for the beginning of a tune. The big blue sky swallows up the scales I play without complaining that it's too early in the morning, or too late at night.

The wind reminds me that I am a mortal when I am pedaling up the road. Before I go to sleep, I lie in bed and memorize the night sky



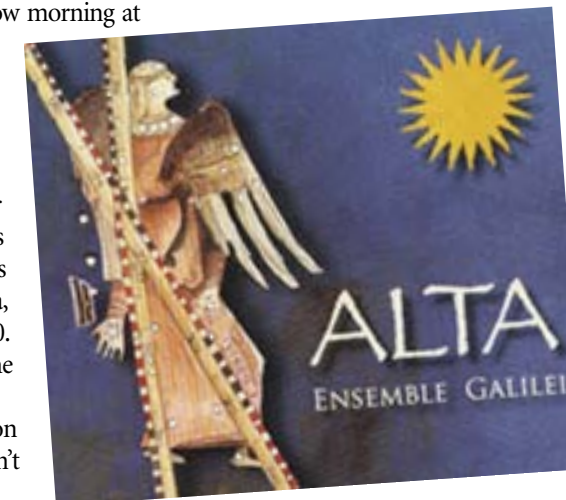
Carolyn Surrick with her viola da gamba, a rare instrument that went out of style in 1750. When this photo was taken she was five months pregnant. She played for a banker in Pinedale. “That was how I got a loan that no bank on the East Coast would have given me. Ever.”

so that when I am surrounded by those endless city lights, I can close my eyes and imagine the Milky Way, Orion's Belt, the Pleiades, and that silver sliver of the moon.

I can't live in Pinedale year-round. But I can bring my music. I can bring the band. We can play at the library at Christmas. I can play at the retirement community in the summer. Maybe next year, I can do some work in the school.

I heard the quiet under the crow's wings and didn't forget, and I won't forget Rex's words about newcomers. He was right, but he was wrong too. I'm not sure he will ever understand what it means to leave

the crazy world out there beyond Pinedale, travel for 13 hours, and then arrive in heaven, even if it's only for the summer. ■



Carolyn Anderson Surrick is a musician and writer who lives in Annapolis, Md.—when she's not in Pinedale. She tours and records with Ensemble Galilei, performing Irish, Scottish, Early Music and original compositions. She can be reached by e-mail at gambaville@earthlink.net.