



## Stopping by Woods on a Snowy Evening

by Robert Frost

Whose woods these are I think I know.  
His house is in the village though;  
He will not see me stopping here  
To watch his woods fill up with snow.

My little horse must think it queer  
To stop without a farmhouse near  
Between the woods and frozen lake  
The darkest evening of the year.

He gives his harness bells a shake  
To ask if there is some mistake.  
The only other sound's the sweep  
Of easy wind and downy flake.

The woods are lovely, dark and deep,  
But I have promises to keep,  
And miles to go before I sleep,  
And miles to go before I sleep.



## COVID VIGNETTE — NIGHT LIGHTS

by Gary L. Saunders

Is there intelligent life on other planets? No one yet knows. If there is, and it's not too distant altogether, they surely know that ours does harbour life. For Earth's night side, seen from space, is wreathed in human-made silvery light almost from pole to pole. Canadian astronaut Chris Hadfield, doing his 2013 stint on the International Space Station, was amazed.

In a way my small corner of the planet, namely Clifton in central Nova Scotia, is lit up too. Living there since 1965, I still enjoy walking its gravel road after supper. "After dinner rest a while; after supper walk a mile", said our forebears. Good advice, especially in these stressful COVID times.

Walking there alone one evening last year, I spotted overhead a slender-winged bird swooping high and low after moths and mosquitoes. Larger than a swallow, smaller than a marsh hawk, it was my first nightjar (aka nighthawk) in years. Watching its effortless grace reminded me of Gerard Manley Hopkins's "Windhover" poem:

*My heart in hiding  
Stirred for a bird, –  
the achieve of, the mastery of the thing!*

That bird, that poem, made my day, my week.

Besides hosting bird life, our road, skirting as it does Cobequid Bay's east end, offers wide daytime vistas: eastward toward Truro, northward toward Debert, Masstown and Portapique, southward toward Noel Shore and the Shubenacadie River estuary.

Come September, unless there's a moon or clear starlight, those vistas will fade into darkness. But even with no moon it's never pitch dark. Now, thanks to Daylight Saving Time, dark comes an hour early, revealing not just electric lights but, at its best, a host of stars, planets and orbiting satellites.

For instance, late in October I spotted bright Jupiter and pale Saturn dancing together over Halifax. Around the same time, ruddy Mars reappeared over Truro on its two-year circuit of the Sun.

Join me then on a Shore Road walk. Leaving the glare of home and yard, it's wise to wait for one's night vision to kick in. Normally that takes 20 minutes or so. Even then our vision is dim compared to that of, say, a cat or an owl. (Roaming house cats routinely kill roosting songbirds at night.) And while a flashlight is useful in case of traffic or a tumble, temporary blindness isn't pleasant so I seldom use mine.

Heading east first, we see the glow over Truro, its halo if you will. On cloudy or misty nights, it's almost bright enough to read by. Off to the right, dead south, faint and far, is the glow of Halifax and the airport. Farther along, past the nightlong glare of two big dairy

barns, we cross a dyked marsh and meet Highway 236. Besides occasional traffic and the nearby United Church tower's beacon, the whole route is strung with lights all the way to Truro.

Too much light, really. Which is why I prefer the westerly walk, where homes are few and dairy barns nil. Sauntering there one can readily see, down the Fundy coast toward distant Parrsboro, the piercing white flash from 300-metre Sugarloaf Mountain, likely a radio tower. Clockwise then we meet a medley of highway and household lights, all shimmering on the bay's turbulent tide rips. Farther east, flashing its ruby beams in unison, is Nuttby Mountain's cluster of wind turbines.

Along about here, on the rise where K.C. Irving's oil storage tank used to dominate, I usually pivot toward home. This slightly higher view reveals a second array of red lights comes into view southward, namely Mill Brook Reserve's five turbines along Highway 102.

These days, what with COVID-19's recent uptick, America's tortuous 2020 election and the toxic worldwide growth of populism, I sometimes wonder if there *is* intelligent life here on Earth. Still, seeing that nightjar, seeing those two eco-friendly wind farms, seeing OBUC's modestly welcoming beacon, convinces me there is.