*Wok & Roll by Peter Kwong, (Frederic) Inter-County Leader*

**Finding beauty in the nature surrounding our new home**

I can’t believe that it has been over a year since we moved to the Northwoods. It has been a welcome change and I have been keeping myself busy with writing, singing and teaching cooking classes in different communities. Living in Milwaukee, driving 15 to 20 minutes was a long haul. Now, driving an hour or two just to get to my destination is considered "normal."

How life has changed, and it all starts from wanting to be closer to our granddaughter in Minneapolis. It pays off, as before the move, we saw Elise (or Ellie) two to three times a year and only for two to three hours each time. Now, we see her two to three times a month! She turned 3 in November. We’re still counting our blessings.

We love our new home. Not knowing anything about the Northwoods, nor knowing anyone in the community, moving here was a big risk indeed. And somehow, everything works out just fine. The sun rises each morning from our front porch, and sets in the evening at our back porch.

Growing up in Hong Kong and living in different big cities through all these times, I never had the experience to be so close to nature — listening to the rustling trees, the tweeting birds, the giggling squirrels, and the geese squawking loudly above. I never knew that I could actually listen to the wind blowing. It is totally amazing.

I had my knee replacement surgery last November and the recovery is painful but reassuring. Still can’t run or ride my bike yet but I am able to walk up and down the stairs without holding on to the railings. I was told that walking is the best therapy. And so I’ve tried to walk as much as I can each day. Then my wife got me this Fitbit to measure how many steps I actually walked. Ahhhhh!

To start out, 5,000 steps a day is required. So, the first day, I walked and walked and I clocked in 12,000 steps! But I paid the price the next day, having to sit with the heat pad on my back for hours. But that’s the price you pay to stay healthy, no!?

It is quite pleasant to walk in our neighborhood, as we live close to the Ahlgren Wildlife Preserve. There are lagoons, creeks, ponds, and miles and miles of shrubs and trees. I never realized that there are so many different kinds of wildflowers around. And the different species of birds!

I wanted to write more about my walking venture, but then I came across a message that my wife wrote on her weekly newsletter to her congregation. I was so touched, as it says everything that I wanted to say. So I asked her if I can quote her article, and she said, “Sure, if you would take me out to dinner.”

There is a McDonald’s in town, so what the heck. And here is what she wrote:

“While canoeing through the marshes, streams and lakes near my home, I am aware of the richness and the quantity of plants and creatures that populate the neighborhood.

"One evening during sunset this week, my son and I paddled quietly to the edge of the marsh and sat silently, watching the usually elusive sora (small marsh bird) feeding on the insects and snails as they walked gingerly on the lily pads. As we sat and watched the sora, we became aware of a brown head poking up through the water munching loudly on a lily pad — a beaver had surfaced to have a snack.

"We recognized the blessing of being a part of such a rich environment. Clear, clean water flowing through the marsh; deep silt nourishing and providing a foundation for the lilies and other marsh plants; crustaceans, tiny plants and fish providing sustenance for the birds and mammals. This is an environment so clean that frogs and dragonflies abound and one can see the bottom of the lake between the waving water plants.

"We recognize our responsibility to keep it clean and healthy for the next generations of plants, animals, and our own children and grandchildren. What if we created all of our homes and neighborhoods with the care we see reflected in the beauty of the wild, natural world? What if everyone who enters our homes and our workplaces feels nourished and supported by the surroundings and the way they are regarded by the people present?

"As people of faith, we are called to create beauty and nourishment for all those around us. We are named 'Apostles' that will speak of Christ in the way that we interact with others. The statements that we make through our words and actions invite others to be who God calls them to be, as well. Imagine a world of healing and health, of beauty and brilliance, and a world that praises God through its very being.”

Well, I couldn’t have said it better.

I am just counting my blessings over and over, to be able to enjoy nature in the most heartwarming way. My wife has taught me a lot in observing what is around me, not just taking big steps to get to my destinations. I have started to notice the spiderwebs filled with morning dews, glistening under the sun; the tracks that are left by the night-traveling animals; the various shades of greens composed by different trees, grasses, shrubs and wildflowers.

Oh my, how come I have never noticed them before?

I guess I should scratch McDonald’s and take her to someplace different. Hmmm, there is a Dairy Queen close by.

*Go to phkwong.com for more columns and to purchase his book, "Wok & Roll."*