

*“These Things Are Ours: The Art and Words of Gwen Frostic”*

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*The slow beat of herons across the swamp*

*the quiet reflection of a nesting swan*

*as twilight absorbs the dark shadows*

*for a fleeting moment these things are ours*

*then they are ours...forever*

*--Gwen Frostic*

Gwen Frostic (1906-2001), fine artist, writer, naturalist and Michigan Women’s Hall of Fame inductee, created books that combine poetry and woodblock prints to capture the essence of the natural world in northern Michigan.

Despite being a Michigan native and having academic interests in the arts and material culture, I did not become acquainted with Frostic’s works until I met my husband while in graduate school here at Michigan State University. His family lives in the Traverse City area, not that far from Gwen Frostic’s studio in Benzonia, and it was with him on my first trip up north (May 2006) that I became familiar with Gwen Frostic.

Over the past four years, I have spent much time in northern Michigan—swimming at North Bar in Empire, finding morels at Mesick, having cookouts on East Bay, and boating on Torch Lake. Hearing the calls of loons and spotting bald eagles flying overhead has become a large part of my summer life. Through her poetry and her art, which explores this same northern Michigan, the wild northern Michigan, I feel that I have become connected in a rather unexpected way to Gwen Frostic’s life. It is almost as if she is in the water and the wind up there, at least for me.

Frostic’s work does not only appeal on an emotional or intuitive level, however. Another reason that I love to collect Gwen Frostic is my academic interest in intellectual history. Both her poetry and illustrations vividly speak to the environmental and “back to the land” movements of the 1970s. Her books are, I think, just as relevant in the twenty-first century as they were in the 1970s, with sustainability and climate change being so much a part of intellectual discourse today.

Since my first trip to Traverse in 2006, I have collected original Gwen Frostic books whenever I could, frequenting used bookstores in Traverse City and searching for them on eBay and other online booksellers. My wonderful husband has also given me Frostic books as Christmas

presents. In four years, I have collected a very thorough sampling of Frostic's work, with first editions ranging from the 1960s to the 1990s.

I have also begun a small collection of Gwen Frostic printed ephemera—mostly note cards—that I will display along with the book collection, should I be selected. Just as the visual artistry of her illustrations is meant to be seen, so her poems are meant to be heard, and I would also love the opportunity to read some of Frostic's poems from my collection aloud if chosen as a finalist. I sincerely hope that I will be able to share Gwen Frostic's work with others at the MSU Library.