

## Meow of a Sunset

*The Delaware Bayshore yields grand sunsets for viewing, savoring – and painting.*



*Sunset Thompson's Beach*

By J. Morton Galetto

There is a pilgrimage that happens on New Jersey's western shore in which you may be a participant – the observation of the onset of evening. The day loses the harsh casts of cold colors and turns to the warm reds, oranges, and yellows, staging a magical curtain call to daylight with a dramatic "sunset." After a full day it is clearly a heavenly gift.

The sinking of the sun signifies the passage of the day, marked in poetic references over the centuries. I think of old lovers Tevye and Golde being bathed in the chorus, "Sunrise, sunset. Swiftly fly the years, one season following another, laden with happiness and tears." (Fiddler on the Roof. Our sun's daily departure and its beauty brings on a flood of emotions, reflection, memories, thoughts of rest, and tomorrow. A promise of sorts.

Lest you think I'm the only sappy old soul, drive to East Point on the first warm, relatively clear night about fifteen minutes before the big event. During mid-April, that would be about 7:15 EST. People will arrive in vehicles, positioned so they are pointed westward. Those who choose to leave their cars will park behind the Lighthouse and stroll the beach. Sun pillar pilgrims.

I'm not completely sure why, but many people bring their dogs. A few weeks ago I was fascinated by a woman who had brought her cat. And as best I could tell the cat was enthralled - I kid you not.



*A woman enjoys the sunset at East Point accompanied by her cat, who seems equally enthralled by the sun's departure. Photo: Author.*

Cell phones are unpocketed and aimed west as if the Messiah is about to be delivered on the horizon, both musically and in spirit. And they may very well be right.

I decided to call up the seer of all sunsets, the Ditch Master herself, South Jersey's artist laureate Pat Witt. My muse or sage, you might say, and

besides, at 95 she makes me feel like a kid and that's a good feeling.

"Patsy," I said, "I want to talk about sunsets."

"My favorite subject, how can I resist?"

"Talk to me, Patsy."

"Well, when you grow up on a farm you are continually conscious of the sky. Dad use to call me outside for the sunset: 'Patsy, it's going to be a wing dinger!' Sometimes he would say 'whooper doo'."

Pat grew up on the east side of the Maurice River so sunsets were a daily view.

Then she went on to tell me, "You know the Scottish call the twilight glow 'the gloamin'. Look it up." And she recited Harry Lauder's lyrics by rote;

*Roamin' in the gloamin' on the bonnie  
banks o' Clyde,  
Roamin' in the gloamin' wi' ma lassie by  
ma side,  
When the sun has gone to rest,  
That's the time that we love best,  
Oh, it's lovely roamin' in the gloamin'.*

We talked about how most people miss the best part of a sunset. They make a

quick exodus the moment the sun dips beneath the horizon. Secretly I welcome their departure as I remain behind to soak up what comes next – twilight. This is something Pat and I have chatted about many times. They essentially miss the gloamin’.

Pat points out, “The show has just begun.” The scattering of the blue light leaves us with just the warm colors. Then the magic truly begins as the earth is neither completely dark, nor is it fully illuminated.



*Oil Painting by Pat Witt - "Nantuxent Creek." Artist Pat Witt, known for her sunset paintings, relays that she uses a gray background to achieve luminescence. Her palette is four basic colors: 3 reds, 3 yellows, and 3 blues, with one white.*

Pat says if you face the east you actually see the sun’s shadow on the opposite horizon. “After the sun dips below the horizon there’s a pink glow,”

she explains. "In mythology they call it 'Aphrodite's girdle'."

I only recalled that the Greek god Apollo, or earlier, Helios, ushered the sun across the skies from east to west in a golden chariot, and during the dark hours lounged in a golden cup. What a life: a carriage ride by day and respite in a chalice by night!

We spoke of the colors on display, after the sun dips beneath the horizon – that reflect and surround you at nearly 360 degrees. We were clearly feeding off each other's passion for the daily event. I finally asked her, "Patsy, what do you think makes our flatlander marsh sky so alluring?"

Pat told me, "Well, here we have three-fourths sky and one-fourth earth. In the mountains it's much less sky. So there's more sky to enjoy here."

She said she would take a flatlander sky over a mountain's evening sky anytime. I told her that I go to places that initially seem prettier than Southern New Jersey, but in the end I always love home the best, because that's where our emotional attachment lies. We agreed that it is about a sense of place, our place, our roots.

She went on to explain how she never tires of painting a familiar spot because it is always changing, and that the love of a place derives from that intimacy of continual connection. It is always in flux, and with each transformation we witness, we get to know it better. And isn't that what a sunset is all about? Where it starts and ends can be truly transformative. In a few seconds' time it's entirely different.



*Turkey Point December 4:02pm Photo:Author.*



*Turkey Point December 4:46pm Photo:Author.*

"I like the sunset over the marsh better than simply the water," I told her.

"Me too; Bradford's Beach at Dwyer's cove is my favorite. I stayed in a bungalow there and it was magical," and Pat sighed in reminiscence.

I had mentioned to one of my friends, a resident of Fortescue, that I prefer Hansey Creek's nightfall to Fortescue's because I see the creek, the marsh, Fortescue, and the sunset at the same time. And she was quick to reply, "But in Fortescue we get to see both the sunrise and the sunset." This is possible because it is a New Jersey, Delaware Bayshore barrier island. Her remarks truly affirmed that the love of the familiar is what builds appreciation.



Pat inquired, "What is this for, anyway?," wanting to know why I had called to discuss the lowering of the sun.

"Well, I want to write about the best places to see sunsets on the Bayshore," I explained. "You know you have to get back from the tree line because you can't see the sunset through the trees. It's all about viewscape."

"Indeed."

In the end we came up with several recommendations. But I would bet the sunset in the place you love the best is truly the most amazing one for you.

*(Please Scroll for recommended sunset viewing areas and the science of sunsets.)*



**Across from the Bayshore Center In Bivalve.  
Photo Author.**

**Some of Jane and Pat's Cumberland  
County Recommendations:**

Bradford's Beach, Dwyer's Cove, Downe  
Township

Turkey Point Rd., Downe Township

Money Island looking over Nantuxent  
Creek, Downe Township

Hansey Creek Rd., Commercial  
Township

PSEG, Commercial Township

Restoration Site, across from Bayshore  
Center in Bivalve

East Point Lighthouse over the  
meadows, Maurice River Township

Thompson's Beach Rd., Maurice River  
Township, PSEG viewing platform

East side of Union Lake, Millville

Bayside Rd., Greenwich



### **The science of a sunset's color:**

The light from the sun consists of different wavelengths. The colors are red, orange, yellow, green, blue, and violet – essentially the rainbow.

The lower the sun is on the horizon, the more atmosphere the light must pass through. The blue light disperses more widely and in different directions than the other colors, so we perceive more red and orange colors – the warmer colors rather than the cooler ones. Often the landscape appears bathed in a rich, rusty glow.

Low-lying clouds can enhance the colors of the sunset, however if they are on the horizon they can block the

sun's rays and the warm colors, preventing a dramatic sunset. If there are particles in the air like sands from desert storms, volcanic ash, dust, and yes, even smog or pollution, it increases the scattering of blue light and exaggerates the reds, oranges, and yellows even more.