



The View From Listening Point

NEWSLETTER of the Listening Point Foundation, Inc.
VOLUME X, NUMBER 1 ~ SUMMER 2008

Listening Point Named to National Historic Registry

By Kevin Proescholdt

It's official: Listening Point, the land and cabin on Burntside Lake near Ely that provided respite and inspiration for conservationist and author Sigurd F. Olson, has been named to the National Register of Historic Places.

"We are delighted by this official recognition of the importance of both Sigurd Olson and of Listening Point," said Chuck Wick of Ely, Vice-Chair of the Listening Point Foundation and a life-long friend of Olson's. "On the tenth anniversary of the founding of the Listening Point Foundation, it is a strong validation by the federal government of the importance of our work."

"Not every property nominated makes it to the National Register," explained Tim Rudnicki, Chair of the Listening Point Foundation. "We submitted a lengthy and detailed application to the National Register, and our application then underwent a rigorous evaluation process. This honor will aid our foundation in its work of preserving the Listening Point property as well as Sigurd Olson's legacy of wilderness education."

Sigurd Olson (1899-1982) was a nationally recognized wilderness advocate who actively promoted wilderness conservation with national organizations like the Izaak Walton League, National Parks Association, and the Wilderness Society. Though he worked on wilderness issues across the country, he worked for many decades to protect his beloved Quetico-Superior region, the international area that includes the Boundary Waters Canoe Area Wilderness, Quetico Provincial Park, and Voyageurs

National Park.

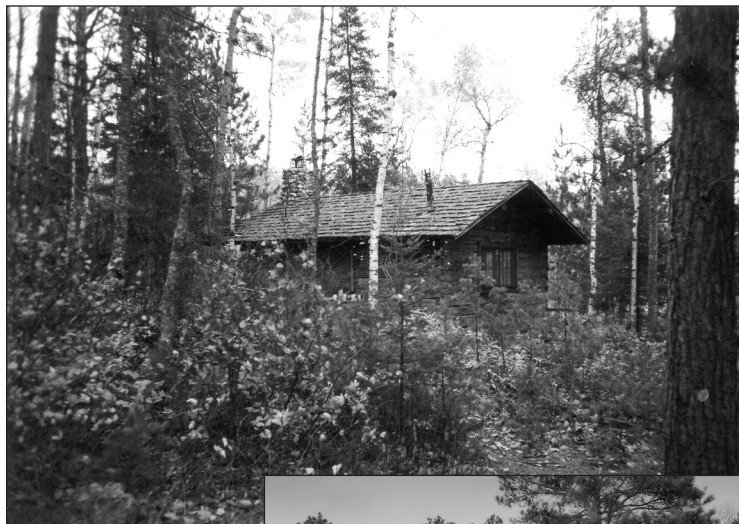
Olson also became one of the nation's most loved wilderness authors. His evocative writing captured the canoe country in nine books like *The Singing Wilderness* (1956), *Listening Point* (1958), and *Reflections from the North Country* (1976). Sigurd Olson created Listening Point in 1956 as a private retreat. It became widely known and celebrated after Alfred Knopf published Olson's book of the same name two years later.

The National Register of Historic Places is the official list of historic properties recognized by the federal government as worthy of preservation for their significance in American history, architecture, archaeology, engineering, and culture. The National Register was created in 1966 and is part of a national program to coordinate and support public and private efforts to identify, evaluate, and protect our significant historic places under the provisions of the National

Historic Preservation Act.

The Listening Point Foundation, Inc., a nonprofit charitable organization, was established in 1998 and is dedicated to furthering Sigurd Olson's legacy of wilderness education, and preserving Listening Point, the rugged northern Minnesota lakeshore property. The Listening Point Foundation owns and cares for Listening Point, conducts visits for the interested public, publishes wilderness education materials, and sponsors wilderness educational programs. ●

—Kevin Proescholdt serves on the National Advisory Board of the Listening Point Foundation



Jim Brandenburg



Jim Brandenburg

Reasons to Celebrate

Yes, we do have many reasons to celebrate.

One of the biggest reasons is you, a member of the Listening Point Foundation, who have helped the Foundation reach its 10th year of working to protect Listening Point and to advance Sigurd Olson's legacy of wilderness education. We also celebrate the timeless Listening Point, written by Sigurd Olson 50 years ago, as well as the recent naming of the Listening Point property to the National Register of Historic Places.



courtesy Tim Rudnicki

We have these celebrations because people, like you, understand the importance of Sigurd Olson's works to individuals, our communities and the world. Thank you Bob and Vonnie Olson for your generous gifts of vision, inspiration and the Listening Point to help bring us to the 10th Anniversary of the Listening Point Foundation. While Vonnie has passed on, her kind smile and words of wisdom remain with me. And thank you to the Listening Point Foundation Board of Directors and Advisory Boards for keeping the spirit alive and bringing us to these celebration milestones.

These celebrations mean different things to each one of us—from the first-time reader of this newsletter to those who had the great opportunity to personally know Sigurd Olson and Elizabeth, his wife. For me, these celebrations are about all of our efforts to help more people understand the importance of wild places in our individual lives and for our collective well-being.

Olson knew the immeasurable value that wilderness, a natural sanctuary, offers us and he walked the talk when it came to wilderness and environmental issues. In *What is Wilderness*, written nearly 40 years ago, Olson described the value this way: "In the saving of places of natural beauty and wilderness we are waging a battle for [our] spirit."

I understand Olson's statement to mean this: places of natural beauty and wilderness are all important to us as the human family because they give us a much needed dimension by which to understand ourselves, our place in the natural order and our relationship to other people. For these reasons, wild places are important to us individually and for our collective well-being. We could delve into the psychological and ecosystem basis for Olson's statement or simply reflect on how we felt the last time we were actually in the wilderness or a place of natural beauty or how we feel just knowing somewhere there is an open space or place we call wilderness.

For the well-being of our children, and our collective well-being now and in the future, we need to be wary of attempts to obscure or otherwise diminish the importance of wilderness. We need a crucial third dimension to help remind us about the true importance, meaning and value of wilderness. That third dimension is supplied by Sigurd Olson in his many written and other works and the totality of Listening Point on Burntside Lake.

We do, indeed, have many reasons to celebrate and further empower ourselves to enjoy and understand the importance and value of wilderness. The celebration of the Listening Point Foundation is really about celebrating the work of many people and the tremendous empowerment tools we have in Olson's works and Listening Point. As we join together to protect these teaching tools and make them available to more people, I invite you to learn more about the Preserve Listening Point Forever Campaign and the other teaching tools available through the Listening Point Foundation. Thank you for helping us celebrate the 10th Anniversary of the Listening Point Foundation. I look forward to hearing from you. ●

—Tim Rudnicki

You can reach Tim by telephone at 952-915-1505
or by e-mail at tjrudnicki@earthlink.net

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New Faces on the Board

Karen Nielsen Friedrich

Born and raised in the San Francisco Bay area, Karen studied marketing and finance in school. After graduating, she moved to New York to pursue work in the business world there. She worked as a security analyst and a trader for a New York Stock Exchange firm for six years.

While in New York, Karen realized her heart was not in numbers and money, and left Wall Street to pursue more creative outlets. She began to redirect her life to where her passion is: art and nature. She and her husband, Wayne, moved to Maine where he worked as a boat builder and she a gardener/designer. They spent most of their spare time sailing the Maine coast and exploring the islands, studying the wonderful birds and native plants.

About 15 years ago, Wayne brought her up to the BWCA for a canoe trip. "We went out for about two weeks and just paddled everywhere," Karen said. "Before we began our trip, a friend gave us a copy of *Listening Point* and that was my introduction to Sigurd Olson. I began looking at our precious surroundings in a different and more appreciative way."

The next year, Karen and Wayne made two trips to the Boundary Waters; the following year, they made three trips. Then the winter trips began. Not being able to get Ely out of their hearts, they decided to move there. "Ely has remarkable sense of community and closeness of people," Karen said. "And there is feeling of peace and rejuvenation of spirit here that you can't get in a larger town." Karen and Wayne (and Emma the yellow lab) live on the Shagawa River and run a garden design business called Flora Borealis. ●



Courtesy Karen Friedrich

Terry Beirl

Theresa (Terry) Beirl is currently the Executive Director of Institutional Advancement at Northland College in Ashland, Wis. In her 25 years at Northland, she has held many positions in the development office including Alumni Director and Director of Major Gifts. She also spent more than two years as the director of the Sigurd Olson Environmental Institute where she was able to develop phase one of the Sigurd Olson legacy project with the development of a display case of Sig's memorabilia. Stop by the Institute to see it if you are in Ashland.

Terry and her husband Jeff, who works as Ashland County administrator have three children. Sons Chris and Andrew live in Madison and Minneapolis respectively while daughter Toni is a junior at Ashland High School. Terry is active in Regional Hospice, the Northern Great Lakes Visitor Center Friends Board, and the Chequamegon Bay Pony Club. ●



Courtesy Terry Beirl

This and That...

LPF website launch July 15

A new look for our website will be launched July 15, 2008. Patrick North of Pride Designs has been working on it all—new design, new information, new format. Please take a few moments and have a look! www.listeningpointfoundation.org.

The **Sigurd Olson Birthday Anniversary celebration** held on April 5 at the Town and Country Club of St. Paul was a huge success with 123 people attending—the most ever! Jim Brandenburg was the keynote speaker, Dave Zentner addressed the Foundation's 10th anniversary, music was provided by Doug & Bryan Wood, and the food was excellent. What more can be said?

LPF's 10th anniversary celebratory dinner is being planned for Sept. 13, 2008 here in Ely. The National Register of Historic Places plaque will be unveiled at the Point; other events also are planned. Check out our website for updates. If you are interested in participating, please contact Alanna Johnson at 218-365-7890.

Ely's 28th annual Blueberry Arts Festival will be held at Whiteside Park July 25-27. The LPF informational booth is located at the southwest corner of the park. Drop in and see us, bring along a friend, sit and chat awhile—you are always welcome. A tour of Listening Point will be scheduled during the weekend, stop by for details. And, as always, we are looking for volunteers to meet and greet the visitors to the booth. Please call Alanna Johnson at 218-365-7890 if you are interested in helping out.

A Tour to Listening Point is, once, an event offered by Ely's Vermillion Community College "Nature of the Northwoods" program during the summer. Melissa Carlson, VCC intern from Duluth, is the guide and coordinator for this year's tour. The trips are scheduled every Tuesday at 1:00 p.m. throughout the summer. The program includes the movie "The Wilderness World of Sigurd Olson," a power point presentation, a trip by van to the Point and to the writing shack. There is a charge for the tour, arrangements can be made by calling 218-365-3385. ●

In Memoriam: Vonnie Olson, 1926-2008

By David Backes

I first met Yvonne Olson in September of 1990, at the beginning of my research for the biography of her father-in-law. I spent a night with her and her husband, Bob, at their home on Uhrenholdt Road in Seeley, Wisconsin, just north of Hayward. It was a beautiful old home surrounded by gorgeous white pines. It was part of an old family farmstead along the Namekagon River. Bob's mother, Elizabeth, had grown up there, fell in love with Sigurd there, got married there. It was wonderful to "get the tour" of the home and land that weekend, and to meet Bob and Vonnie.

What struck me most about Vonnie then, and always did, was her great warmth, a motherly love with which she reached out not only to people, but to animals wild and tame. Everyone felt at home with Vonnie. And anyone who knew her must have loved her. I know I did.

Vonnice was self-effacing. During the years she was secretary of the Listening Point Foundation she routinely referred to herself as Miss Beasley, but she was far more than that. She had a quick and practical mind, and an ability to say just the right thing for the

situation.

If the right thing wasn't entirely pleasant, she would be assertive, but her overall warmth and cheerfulness often helped her to make her point without causing someone to become defensive—an ability that helped her get along famously with her father-in-law.

Vonnice was the one person in the family who could tell off Sigurd Olson when he needed it, and get away with it. "He loved it," Bob once told me. "Everybody else would hunker down. She wasn't being brow-beaten by him."

In the years after I met Bob and Vonnie, I spent many more nights at their house in Seeley. At first, of course, there was the official purpose of interviewing them for the biography, but we would move on to many other topics (believe it or not, you can only talk so long about Sigurd F. Olson!), and we quickly became close.

One of my favorite memories is of doing the dishes with Vonnie. She would wash, and I would dry. Bob might be out doing another chore, or he would put away the dishes and silverware as I dried them. When I think of Vonnie standing there in the kitchen, wearing rubber gloves and an apron, I can see her smile, and hear her laugh. I can feel her love. ●

—David Backes is the author of the award-winning biography of Sigurd F. Olson titled *A Wilderness Within: The Life Of Sigurd F. Olson*



Courtesy Robert K. Olson

Thank you to all those who expressed their memory of Vonnie through a memorial donation in her name:

Grant & Marilyn Albrecht
 Donna Arbaugh
 Pepper & Clint Asche
 Jeff & Terry Beirl
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 Matt Vertin
 William Wang
 & Marna Ebbesen
 Richard & Audrey Webb
 Chuck & Marty Wick
 Bob & Marilyn Woodbury

Life Well Lived

Vonnice was the daughter of an old and distinguished family in South Carolina and given in adoption to Major Adolph and Mrs. Bessie Urbank in 1928. Vonnie lived in various places in the American West following her father's military responsibilities with the Army and CCC. The family eventually settled in Rhinelander, Wis., which became her home town and where she graduated from high school in 1944. She then attended Northland College in Ashland, Wis., where she met and married retired Air Force veteran Robert K. Olson.

Following Bob's appointment to the U.S. Foreign Service, Vonnie assumed the life of a diplomatic wife and representative. The Olsons lived in Benghazi, Libya; Beirut, Lebanon; Paris; Rome; Ottawa, Canada; and Washington D.C. during the Cold War and several revolutions and wars in the Middle East and Vietnam where Bob served for two years.

In 1986 Bob and Vonnie returned permanently to the family home on Uhrenholdt Road in Seeley, Wis., where they enjoyed gardening, wildlife, visiting friends, and volunteering. Vonnie and Bob collaborated in founding the Northwest Chapter of the Wisconsin Woodland Owners Association, and established the Listening Point Foundation, Inc.

Vonnice is survived by her husband Bob and son Derek. She was preceded in death by her parents and eldest son Burnham Keith. Memorials may be directed to The Listening Point Foundation.

An Everyday Miracle

The First Decade of the Listening Point Foundation

By Robert K. Olson

Whatever the future may bring, the first 10 years of the Listening Point Foundation (LPF) will always be remembered as its heroic age, the events themselves as legendary, and the men and women who did them as the lords and ladies of a legendary past.

This is no empty boast. The future always wreathes the past in glowing images of idealism and beauty. So it will be with the LPF. But more so, what the LPF did during those 10 years was to rescue, enshrine and set up for the world to remember one of the most beautiful and meaningful ideas during this sordid era of lechery and ugly violence. A hundred years from now, people will ask, "How could they have done it? Who were they, these wonderful people?" A few incidentals tell the story.

The preservation of Listening Point had been a constant worry for Sig Olson and his wife Elizabeth, family and friends. But what to do was never resolved. Various proposals had been made by Bob and Vonnice Olson and Martin and Ester Kellogg. But they came to nothing.

Then one fall afternoon as Chuck Wick and Bob were hiking back home from the Point, it struck them both: "Hey, what are we waiting for? We ought to set up a foundation or trust." Excited, they went home to talk it over with Marty Wick and Vonnice. It sounded good all around. And that was that: the beginning.

There followed days of talk, telephone calls, discussions, lists of duties and things to do. Randy Pachal, CPA from Hayward, agreed to do the official paperwork so that by 1998, the LPF became the Listening Point Foundation Inc. with non-profit status established to attract donations. One of the major boosts at the time was the 1997 publication by the University of Minnesota Press of Dave Backes' biography of Sigurd Olson, *The Wilderness Within*, which attracted wide attention and publicity in itself.

Donors. The LPF started life financially flat. Then it suddenly had \$5,000 raised from the sale of the two northern lots of Listening Point to Chuck and Marty. It was an ideal arrangement. Chuck knew Listening Point from the beginning, was an old friend of the Olsons, and, with his residence next door, provided a lifetime guarantee of loving responsible care of the point. His annual payments for the lots kept the LPF going even though everyone worked on a volunteer basis. However, donations themselves increased gradually so that by 2006, the LPF balance on account topped six figures.

It was hard work. Bob and Vonnice teamed up as CEO and Secretary, respectfully. Chuck and David Peterson managed Listening Point physically, including improving the parking lot and road, and escorted a growing number of visitors, which soon reached more than 300 annually. The cabin was re-shingled and the sauna repaired pro bono by Dave Tworek and his team from

Hayward. An inspired idea from Dave Peterson saved the old wooden shingles from getting burned up and, instead, became much sought over souvenirs for LPF members, bringing in an additional source of income.

The first LPF newsletter, from the Summer of 1999, celebrated Listening Point's survival intact from the devastating summer storm that leveled half the BWCAW. Grandson Derek Olson was there and saw the whole thing.

It would be impossible to describe in detail the numerous efforts and activities that kept the LPF growing. Beyond Dave Zentner, Mike Link, Nancy Jo Tubbs, Kim Bro, and Malcolm McLean, for example, are members of the boards, main and advisory, past and present, not to mention dozens who have contributed personal help and made financial contributions. For example, during two summers, in addition to the Blueberry Fest show, the LPF sponsored a summer program for writers and artists called "Speaking of Wilderness." The programs were enormously popular and successful, drawing huge summer crowds and practically every author in the region. However, they also meant a lot of work. The board realized that it was overextending itself so the series had to be cancelled, much to everyone's regret.

Nevertheless, special mention must be given to board member Paul Monson who has been the master of ceremonies, organizer, leader and chief enthusiast of the highly successful Sigurd Olson annual birthday luncheon. Held at the attractive St Paul Country Club, the luncheons bring outstanding speakers, inspiring representatives and a center for the meeting of wilderness lovers throughout the area. A year without the annual Sigurd Olson Birthday Luncheon would be unthinkable.

One of the most notable achievements of 2000 was the registration of the LPF under a conservation easement through the Minnesota Land Trust (MLT). In the words of MLT Communications Director Jill Pearson-Wood, "Listening Point...will be protected forever." This fulfills Sigurd Olson's wish as expressed in his book, *Listening Point*: "I must leave it as beautiful as I found it. Nothing must ever happen there that would detract in the slightest from what it now had." This is without doubt one of the most important examples of the serious philosophy and purposes of the LPF.

It was about this time that Bob and Vonnice retired as President/CEO and Secretary, turned 80 and decided that the time had come to step aside to make way for younger and more energetic replacements. Alanna Johnson took over as contract manager and Executive Director, Nancy Jo as Secretary, and Tim Rudnicki as Chairman of the Board. (It was decided to abolish the title of President.) Other members of the original board also retired, mainly because of age, to be replaced by younger, more fresh and dynamic new members. Thus the LPF renewed itself

naturally. Martin Kellogg, also a new member, took over responsibility for launching a program to create an LPF maintenance endowment fund.

A second important and notable achievement of this year has been the acceptance, after many years of work and expense of having the LPF accepted as a member of the National Register of Historic Places. This joins with the conservation easement as a dual guarantee of the permanence and importance of the foundation.

At the time of this writing, the LPF has clearly been a success not only in its own right as a recognized and respected member of the American wilderness community. It has also been host to such luminaries as Wisconsin Senator Russ Feingold and Wilderness Society President Bill Meadows as well as hundreds of students and wilderness enthusiasts. It would be impossible to measure the value and importance of these contacts, but it suggests that the LPF is becoming as historic, revered and influential as Walden Pond has been for Thoreau.

If the past is any indication, the next twenty years will see the LPF more fully funded, directed by young, able and dedicated paid staff and an increasingly important influence in the support and preservation of wilderness.

The LPF has had the good fortune to have grown without any major internal issues or controversy. Only one central issue remains unresolved, but, fortunately, is also dynamic and creative. That is the question as to whether the LPF is dedicated primarily to the preservation of Listening Point and the inspiration of the human spirit or should concentrate on the more active support for wilderness preservation locally, nationally and internationally. The difference is actually only apparent for the one supports the

other. But it seems to be the question of the dichotomy between ends and means. Do we preserve wilderness by concentrating on the human heart and soul? Or, do we preserve the human heart and soul by actively preserving existing wilderness? In fact, it cannot be either alone because one without the other is meaningless.

Sigurd Olson never resolved the question or even addressed it directly. At one time he spoke of saving wilderness worldwide. At another time he said that wilderness was basically a state of mind, an idea as real in your own back yard as in the world at large. However, his deepest, most personal writing seems to have favored the latter as an almost religious precept.

What should the LPF do about it: anything, either or both? The answer it would seem is not whether or what but rather the conscious recognition of the essential question and the understanding that it must be part of any issue having to do with the human state and that of nature together. The LPF can make a major contribution by helping to develop a sophisticated appreciation of the issue and its resolution.

Thus the heroic first decade of the Listening Point Foundation. If this issue is finally resolved to the mutual satisfaction of wilderness philosophers and lovers, a hundred years from now, perhaps a thousand, they will ask: "How did they do it? Who were these extraordinary people?" ●



Coming to Ely? Plan on a visit to Sig's
"Listening Point." Just give us a call!
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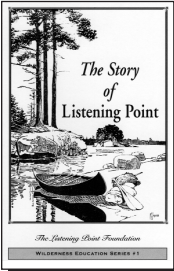
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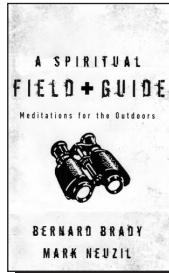
Share the spirit of Listening Point with friends and family with one of these gift items that celebrate Sigurd Olson and Listening Point.



The Story of Listening Point

This 28-page booklet, written by Sig's son Robert K. Olson, tells the inside story of how Listening Point came to be and why, what it meant to Sigurd Olson, and what it continues to mean to wilderness lovers and loyalists. Features dozens of historical photos and images.

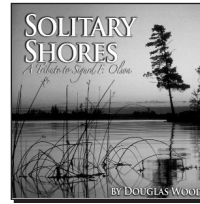
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A Spiritual Field Guide

This 192-page softcover book contains passages from a wide variety of writers, activists and others (including Sigurd E. Olson) who have thought long and deeply about the meaning and value of nature and wilderness. A perfect trip companion.

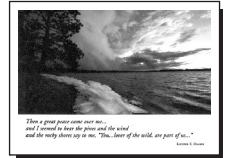
..... \$13



Solitary Shores CD

First recorded in 1983, *Solitary Shores* was Douglas Wood's musical tribute to Sigurd Olson. All of the songs have a strong North Country flavor, and there is even a segment of Sig reading from one of his own essays. This is an album for lovers of the Northwoods and fans of Sig Olson.

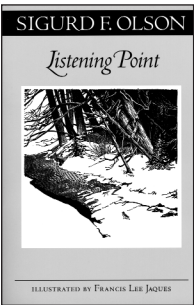
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Brandenburg Cards

Listening Point at winter's end, captured by photographer Jim Brandenburg and featuring a quote from Sigurd Olson. Set of 10 full-color note cards with envelopes.

..... \$20

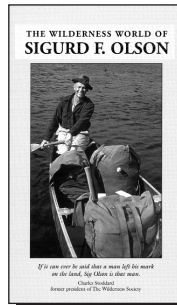


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Attractive paperback versions of seven of Sigurd Olson's most loved books.

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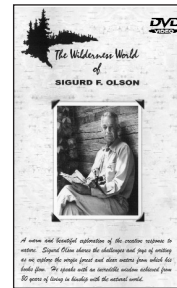
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The Wilderness World of Sigurd F. Olson Video

This intimate film captures the life and spirit of Sigurd Olson late in his life. VHS format, 30 minutes long.

..... \$15



The Wilderness World of Sigurd F. Olson DVD

A digitally remastered version of the classic film "The Wilderness World of Sigurd F. Olson" includes more than two hours of conversations with Sig as he speaks about the craft of writing and life in the wilderness. You'll also hear Sig's wife Elizabeth and their son Sig Jr. speak candidly about Sigurd, his profession, and life in the north woods. The audio clips are set to a slideshow of Olson family photographs.

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☐ Shipping/Handling (\$2.00 for each item) @ \$ 2.00 = _____

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Orders also may be placed by email (to listeningpoint@cpinternet.com) or fax (to 218/365-7072). Invoices will be included with your shipped order.

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THE VIEW FROM LISTENING POINT — SUMMER 2008

Published by
The Listening Point Foundation, Inc.
P.O. Box 180
Ely, Minnesota 55731
Telephone: 218/365-7890
FAX: 218/365-7072
Website: www.listeningpointfoundation.org
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Produced and printed by Advance Printing,
15576 US Hwy 63, Hayward, WI 54843;
phone 715/634-6888; fax 715/634-6912;
advprint@cheqnet.net

Editor: Laurence J. Wiland
Production: Debra Kurtzweil

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