



Oct 22, 2017

Not many dogs look up. They're ruled by their noses. Which means they keep their heads low to the ground sucking up scent trails until they practically bump into whatever they were stalking.

They miss so much this way.

Sully looks up. Much more than even my two sighthounds, who,

the theory goes, have a hunt drive that's activated by motion, even a mile or more away. But Oona and Oisin miss a lot of squirrels. Once one skitters up a tree past the horizontal plane... it's vanished.

But not to Sully, who we think of as the Curly Howard of our bunch. He's always up for a romp or a rumble. He's part Treeing Walker hound, dogs bred to hunt possums and raccoons in the trees. Do you still see the squirrel, Sully?

"Soitenly!"

Looking up, Sully also sees hawks and turkey buzzards buzzing the treetops. Sometimes he tracks clouds. Lord knows what else the little guy sees. Sometimes I catch him staring up looking unreasonably pleased.

October is a great month to look up. At night you can see the wildest things. Waves of cool air filter in and dust and pollution fall away. On those clear nights, the stars come out and twinkle and pulse, signaling to some deep part of us.

Coming off Buck Mountain to work before dawn, I can now see Venus and Mars, gleaming over Cookeville, forming a triangle with the crescent moon. They compel the eye to look.

October is the month when Uranus, the seventh planet from the sun, is visible to the naked eye. Starting Thursday night, it started appearing in the constellation Pieces in the southeastern sky.

Uranus is 1.7 billion miles away. We see it best this month because it's sitting directly opposite the sun. We're not actually seeing Uranus, we're seeing sunlight gleam off the ice clouds

that envelope the planet.

It's so far away that it takes three hours for the light to reach us. It's a diamond hard point of blue-green light.

Just last night, the earth started moving through the Orionid meteor cloud and you could see up to 15 shooting stars per hour in the pre-dawn darkness, debris shed by Halley's comet.

We won't see the comet itself again until 2061, but from now through the end of the month, you can see Halley's orphans blazing across the heavens in startling arcs.

But you have to turn off the TV, shut down your computer, pocket your cellphone and walk away from Facebook and your favorite shows. You have to go out and look up, just as man has done for hundreds of thousands of years.

Most of us won't. Light pollution from signs, security lights and street lamps has dimmed the heavens. We have brighter things to distract us. And we're missing so much.

Because when you gaze at the stars you get outside your own self. You realize our world is just a speck in the vast dance of the galaxy, and our galaxy is just one point in a far-flung sea of stars. It's humbling and it's awesome.

And we're just not into such things anymore...