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Life Lists

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Life Lists

Learning my birds one by one
—the year was 1964—I was the one
with the crystal blue eyes gazing up, up, up
to the northern Michigan pines
from my Uncle Joe's shoulders.

Yellow-bellied sapsuckers
Robin red breasts
Red winged blackbirds

Glints of yellow, red, black
sparkled through the needles
as I gazed up over the head
of the gentle man who taught me my first birds.
I squinted, following his finger
to the high limbs of the trees,
as I listened to him quietly chant their names.

Birds have been added,
more exotic, rarer,
but I look for three time and again.
And I remember the summer of my fourth year
and the chanting of the names that lingers as my summer song.