



# Limited Sight Distance: Essays for Airwaves

*Robert Root*

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## **Limited Sight Distance: Essays for Airwaves** Robert Root

"I think these essays are better than Andy Rooney's," an editor told Bob Root, after reviewing Root's collection of radio essays, "and I'd love to publish them once you're as famous as Andy Rooney." Several other editors said much the same thing, though the comparison wasn't always to Andy Rooney and in some cases Root was only judged to be "as good as" some well-established personality. Though his series for the local portion of NPR's Morning Edition ran for eight years and was heard throughout central and northern Michigan, Root suspected that he wasn't going to become as famous as Andy Rooney. Once he stopped essaying for the radio to write and edit a number of other books, the more than two-hundred-and-fifty radio scripts were relegated to a file box that was scarcely opened twice in the ensuing twenty-five years. In that interval Bob Root continued to teach composition and literature courses at Central Michigan University and introduced new courses in creative nonfiction into its master's program in composition and communication. After taking early retirement he taught for the Lighthouse Writers Workshop in Denver and the Loft Literary Center in Minneapolis and currently teaches nonfiction in the low-residency MFA Program in Creative Writing at Ashland University. He presented at national, international, and regional conferences on composition and creative nonfiction, was invited to speak at writing programs and workshops, and published widely in literary and educational journals. He also edited historical manuscripts, served as an artist-in-residence at three national parks, and published seventeen books. While writing his recent memoir, *Happenstance*, he happened again upon his radio essays, some of which were important for the new book. He had also been preparing his grandmother's 1937 psychology column, *How to Develop Your Personality*, for e-book and print-on-demand publication, and as he reviewed the radio essays, he realized that he didn't have to wait to be as famous as Andy Rooney anymore—he could bring the collection out into the world for people who enjoyed the series to encounter again and for anyone else to discover. "This is Bob Root, thinking out loud" was the signature close of each broadcast essay, and "Thinking Out Loud" became the working title of the series. *Limited Sight Distance: Essays for Airwaves* collects fifty of the best "Thinking Out Loud" essays, as well as three additional essays written after the series ended, including the longer title essay. In that essay he writes, "For a long time now *Limited Sight Distance* has similarly seemed to me to be a significant slogan for an essayist. . . . Don't expect to see very far, it will warn me; don't assume unobstructed vision. . . . As an essayist I have a simple charge—to look carefully at whatever falls within my field of vision and to reflect thoroughly, thoughtfully, on whatever I see." In these essays he muses on the old house in which he lives, the neighborhood around it, memories of growing up in Western New York, the seasons he observes, the sensations of traveling, encounters with the cosmos, and interludes in the natural world. In these pages readers will meet an amiable sojourner, observing what he finds around him, sharing his reflections, thinking out loud.

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