

Life in Bloom



The Art of Living Fully

Essays by Marjorie Rachlin



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edited by Douglas Allchin

Editor's Introduction

Marjorie Rachlin (1922-2021) seems to have impressed nearly everyone she encountered. “Extraordinary woman.” “One of a kind.” “Whip-smart.” “I owe her so much.” Her career focused on labor education. But she was equally committed to conservation, advocating for women in politics and business, local civic organization, and promoting the visual arts. In her private life, she reveled in birding, gardening, cooking, and a broad spectrum of literature, as well as the craft of writing. What guided this extraordinarily diverse engagement and achievement? This collection of Marjorie’s essays (most unpublished) is intended to provide a glimpse into her remarkable worldview and personality. The writing brims with vibrancy and insightful reflection, even when addressing the most ordinary of life events: ordering seeds for the garden, tending cats, visiting a sister, or refurbishing an old table. Ultimately, I hope this small volume serves as an informative celebration and tribute to a “life in bloom.”

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Vignettes



The Yellow Table

The table sits in the center of the dining room, its yellow top bright in the sunlight coming through the two front windows. It's the kind of table newly-married couples bought in a "suite" in the 1920's, four sturdy legs holding up a substantial top, The legs are thick, elephant-like except for the carved whorls and bulges that ornament them. Closed, the table seats six people — you have to crawl under to release the latch, being careful not to bump your head, if you want to add a leaf for parties.

Margaret smiles whenever she glances at it, passing into the hall or going to the kitchen. Many years ago, when they first acquired the table along with the house, she wanted to get rid of it, it was so ugly. But it spoke to her husband of solidity, permanence. Eventually he agreed to let her paint it. She sanded carefully, then brushed two coats of expensive yellow enamel paint on the top and the band around the sides. Finally waxed and polished, the tabletop became a deep golden-yellow pool in the center of the room.

A photograph of Monet's dining room in Giverny was the inspiration for this transformation. Monet had painted his long table and chairs yellow with touches of blue; his walls were hung with prints and woodblocks in various shades of blue. That was a bit more than Margaret could manage — she uses

blue placemats, blue and white dishes, and a blue bowl for flowers.

The walls in the dining room are white, setting off a varied collection of paintings and prints she and her husband have acquired over the years. But she has added a color new to Monet's scheme; on the floor is an Oriental rug in deep shades of red with a bit of dark blue. Now the table floats in the sunlight, a yellow raft above the lustrous red.

Margaret is inordinately proud of the table. She's surprised when people don't notice it. It's not just that the whole room is a vibrant blend of yellow, red and white. How many people would have the imagination, the gall, to take a perfectly good mahogany dining table and paint the top yellow?

Echoing in her ears is her mother's voice when she was growing up. "You don't have to be like everyone else. Be different." Most parents didn't seem to think like that in the 1930's. Everyone she knew was very conventional; what you wore and what you put in your house had severe social limitations. Her mother, she realizes now, freed her up to think outside the box — for more than the dining room table.



Marjorie during fall garden clean up with her grandniece, 2018

Gardener's World I: Fall Chores

"Those blue morning glories. Incredible!"

Carolyn's enthusiasm was heart-warming — she comes to see my garden often and her appreciation spurs me on.

"Thanks. I've been babying plants all summer so I'll have fall flowers."

"What's that nice bush with the lavender spikes?"

"That Mexican salvia is the October back-drop for the dahlias. It will die soon, I'm afraid, doesn't like frost."

Fall chores were pressing on my mind. After Carolyn left, I donned my beat-up garden shoes, pulled on gloves, and surveyed the back yard. Where to start?

Saving seeds is always gratifying. Some for next summer, some for friends.

I began with the Mexican cosmos, an unexpected blaze of orange all summer, lighting up the tomatoes and the cucumbers. I got the seeds last year from the woman who plants it in one of the marvelous Smithsonian gardens on the Mall. Now I need my own. The spiky seeds soon filled an old spice jar. I picked plenty since one never knows how well they will germinate next spring.

The cosmos plants were dying, but I had to move carefully to pull them up, since healthy chard

plants lurked underneath. The chard usually lasts over the winter, providing tasty green leaves next spring. Mulch is wise — I tucked pine needles around each plant.

One more seed chore. My friend Sandy wants seeds of cleome, an old-fashioned flower with a ball of spidery blooms in white or lavender. Picking the seeds is fun, twisting the pod until it pops open and drops ten little black seeds into your palm. Another spice jar filled, then marked with name and date.

I peered underneath the cleome to check on the foxgloves. Tiny green dots on the surface of the dirt told me that new seeds were finally sprouting. I need the foxglove for my vision of May — a sea of blue forget-me-nots low on the ground, with tall spikes of foxglove, lavender and white, rising among them. It never makes the artful picture I have seen in English estate gardens, because the foxglove never comes up where it should, but I keep trying. At least it was coming up!

On to a spell of bending, stooping, squatting -- cutting back the perennial plants so they'll be healthy next spring.

The pruning shears made short work of the astilbe stalks. Small green leaves appearing at the base assured me that the row would again be a pale pink cloud, after the foxglove were gone. Each

plant got the sprinkle of bone meal recommended by the books.

The shasta daisies nearby are a problem. They are what is known as “a strong grower,” which means “watch out.” My clumps make a gorgeous show of white daisies in June, on either side of the lawn, but they are killing their neighbors. I went for the spade, carved out several chunks, and carted them to the compost heap.

Stretching tall to mollify my back, I noticed that both chrysanthemums were just beginning to bloom. There is an ever-hardy pink one that is a memento of a friend's garden in Wisconsin and a tall white one that a neighbor felt I had to have. Both bloom late (part of my plan for fall “succession”), sometimes even providing a few flowers for the Thanksgiving dinner table.

A twinge in my knee cautioned me. Better take time for a cup of coffee in the lawn chair. A chance to rest and reflect. All the garden articles recommend fall as the time to step back, own up to mistakes, then look ahead and let the imagination roam to next year.

I surveyed the garden in front of me. There is a lovely green lawn, with a square garden at one side. As a backdrop, I'm lucky to have dogwood trees, a terra-cotta red now, with huge oaks behind them.

Nice setting, but unfortunately I have a “bones” problem. “Bones” are the trees, shrubs, fences and walkways that give structure and cohesion to the

garden, making it a well-balanced picture. Around them are the smaller, ephemeral flowers and vegetables.

My bones are helter-skelter. A butterfly bush grew up in the middle of the flower bed, and I don't want to take it down because it attracts beautiful yellow swallowtails. My husband wants the tomato plants right in the middle where they will get the most sun. And there's a lovely clematis that fills the air with cinnamon scent when it blooms in August, but it has grown into a huge shapeless lump.

It's the usual gardener's dilemma. Aesthetic visions lose out to special interests — a new flower, evocative scent, the hummingbird's preferences, a friend who gave you something special.

Still — the clematis demands action. Should I get an arched trellis ? . Drape it over a low fence ? Just get rid of it? Nothing seems right. Luckily I can put off this decision until the winter, the time when gardeners wait for spring and cogitate.

There's a fun chore in the immediate offing. Bulbs. Planting bulbs is dessert — a reward for hard work and arthritic pain. This year I'm going to put red tulips and blue violas in the front barrels, and lavender tulips with yellow pansies in the back. But where will I put that impulse purchase, the early orange ones?

Hoisting myself out of the lawn chair, my knee yelps. Pace yourself. Tomorrow for the bulbs. No hurry. There are weeks of important work ahead before the garden is ready for spring.

Gardener's World II: The Seed Catalog

In January, when grey clouds and cold winds wither the soul, I take the seed catalogs out of the drawer. I pour a glass of white wine, lie down on the couch, and let the glossy pictures take me to an alluring future.

"Let's put heavenly blue morning glories up the bean fence," I say to my husband. "Don't you think the blue would look nice with the red blossoms of the runner beans?"

"They didn't do well last year," he says, "but we have seeds left." Over the years he has become resigned to my visions.

Visioning is what seed ordering is all about. During the waiting time of winter, comfortably warm in the living room, the gardener's inner eye walks around the yard, looking at the garden beds along its sides and the main bed that stretches across the back. She's puzzling out a picture of the way they should look in the summer and fall.

My dream vision starts with the perennial flower gardens of England. I see drifts of color — "masses" in gardener's parlance — blending into one another. I remember the red dahlias of Hidcote, standing tall, in the red and orange garden. I smell the white roses swooning gracefully over the trellis at Sissinghurst. In these pictures, everything looks carefree

and natural: there are no rogue plants to break the perfection of line and color.

Visions like this are bad for the mental health of the ordinary backyard gardener. It's the impossible dream that I have trouble relinquishing.

Sipping the wine, I go back to reality, focusing on the stone wall that runs along the back of the main garden, with tall oaks beyond.

"I'm going to put cleome all along the wall," I tell my husband. "Those spidery blossoms will make a froth of lavender and white along the wall."

"Great," he says automatically. "What about my tomato plants?"

"Umm." I say. I forgot that I have to leave a gap for two tomato plants because this is his favorite sunny spot.

My mind revises and the massed line of cleome gives way to dots and dashes of color along the wall. The clean design is gone.

It's not unexpected. I'd like to be the kind of Gertrude Jekyll gardener who concentrates on aesthetics, ruthlessly discarding any plant that does not contribute to the right effect. But my character is weak — I am what the garden experts call a plantswoman — a person who likes to try new plants and ignores design considerations in order to



grow an intriguing plant.

My friend Margaret is the aesthete, with a landscape architect's purpose-driven purity. Along the edge of her driveway, she has planted a narrow bed of blue iris, edged with low white dianthus. No weeds, nothing but iris and dianthus. In bloom, it is spectacular. Later in the summer, her garden's focus shifts to a pool of pink petunias under the dark red leaves of a dwarf plum tree. Nothing garish, each mini-garden perfect in its time.

Envyng Margaret's self control, I force my mind back to the seed catalog. Here is a "purple bell vine," of "refined beauty, with bell-shaped flowers that sway from thread-like stems." Seductive. I have never heard of this plant before. Would it help cover the fence ??? Should I try it?

I ponder whether to buy this unknown, although I know full well that seed catalogs are a trap for the unwary. You drown in the adjectives. They report that a plant has "lavish blooms," with "charming umbels" and an "intoxicating fragrance" and it turns out to be a dirty white daisy the size of a quarter with a musty smell. There is one well-known nursery firm that describes everything in the catalog as "hardy as an oak."

Postponing the decision on the bell vine, I continue down the alphabet. In the S's I'm reminded that I want to grow my special red salvia again. When I first saw it at Monticello, Jefferson's estate,

I learned that he brought the seed back from France. I grow it as a tribute – and because it attracts hummingbirds.

"I'm going to order the salvia coccinea," I tell my husband. "Where are you going to put it?" he asks. "You already asked me to grow zinnias, and I'm getting the flats ready."

"I'll put it in the side bed when Mary Lou's poppies are finished," I reply.

Mary Lou's poppies are another blip in the design. She gave me the seeds last summer when I visited. They are one of the many mementos in my garden album – remembrances of friends, of travel. Soon the 19th century yellow daffodils that came from Mario's old farmyard in West Virginia will bloom, and in April I will have bluebells from the New Jersey yard of my English tour companion, Marilyn. The purple-brown iris that are so elegant in May came from Margaret on a visit from Massachusetts. In turn I often carry clumps of my sturdy pink phlox in my tote on the airplane as a hostess gift.

Remembering Mary Lou's poppies make me smile, recalling the long gardening days and the wonderful eating evenings when I visited last summer. I'll finish the seed order this weekend, I decide. There will be other depressing winter evenings that need to be buoyed with garden dreams.



Bonnie Jo Mount, courtesy of *The Washington Post*, July 11, 2014

Maintenance Yard

I love early mornings in the maintenance yard. It's pretty junky, I admit. Untidy piles of rocks and gravel sit at the edges of a dirt turnaround rutted by trucks. Beyond is an acre of grass, thistles and weeds. It's a workaday field for the National Park Service, but for me it's a green bowl of space and sky, hemmed in by trees, secluded from city and traffic. In the fall months, I get out of bed at 6 in order to get there when the rising sun hits the treetops.

As I walk down the trail, through the woods, I wonder who will be here today. I've gotten to know the regulars in the months I've been coming. Soon I spot the three of them, standing where we always do, on a patch of mud, looking at the trees, binoculars at the ready. Joe, Wally and Jim are all retired. They are expert birders, and they come because the Yard is a good place to catch the changing parade of birds that migrate south in the fall.

Joe welcomes me with, "You should have been here a little while ago. A blue-headed vireo."

I cringe. Joe means well, but he's always telling me what I missed. Why didn't I get going earlier?

Wally, soft-voiced, says, "We saw a black-throated green a little while ago." This isn't so bad – I have seen a lot of those warblers in the last month. Jim, my favorite birding buddy, nods hello.

He's wearing the usual birding attire – old blue jeans, windbreaker jacket, baseball cap. All of us wear waterproof boots of some variety -the grass is wet early in the morning.

I take my place beside them, four of us lined up in a row, binoculars poised. We are the "regulars" -- the birders who are retired and can come during the week. On weekends we get people from Maryland and Virginia and who knows where. I've come to feel I'm one of the weekday gang, although I'm not as good a birder as the others. They help me find birds and teach me field marks.

Like me, many birders come to the Yard to learn from the pros. They are generous with their expertise. "See the black wings, chartreuse body. Tanager in fall plumage." Or, "On the left, in the tangle. Thrasher." This is the best way to learn birds.

A small flock of birds lands in the top of the trees, the first small flight of the morning. "Maggie," Jim says, "In the oak."

I don't get my binoculars up fast enough. A yellow belly disappears into the leaves. I wait. A twig quivers, the bird hops out ---greenish back, bright yellow belly, streaked at the sides, tail banded white. A magnolia warbler, possibly arrived on an overnight flight from Canada and on its way to Central America.

"Thanks," I say to Joe.

"Nashville," Wally says. "Ten o'clock in the tulip tree."

We swing binoculars up. Looking at the tree foliage as a clock face, with noon at the peak, ten o'clock is left, partway down.

"Yep. White eye ring," I say with satisfaction. I have gotten a lot better at identifying Nashville warblers this fall.

There is a lull. The sun warms my back. A light wind ripples the yellow and gold leaves of the maple tree in front of me. I admire the porcelain berry vine, whose sea-green beads are draped over darker leaves. Above, the sky has become a deep glowing blue. "October's bright blue weather," I say to myself, remembering a poem from elementary school.

I don't say it out loud, however. The birders don't seem to pay attention to the panorama of the seasons, the colors and scents that change around us. My remarks about the trees turning red and gold along one edge of the yard are usually greeted with a non-committal, "Um."

Suddenly a small green bird pops up in the weeds to one side of me. A warbler. White throat and belly. "Jim," I call urgently. "Over here. What is it?"

He turns. "No wing bars, " I say. Wing bars--with or without - help a birder narrow the identification choices.

The bird disappears.

"Might be a Tennessee," I say. I desperately want it to be a Tennessee warbler. For several weeks I have been trying to find one and identify it

myself.

"Maybe. Didn't see much," Jim says. He was an administrative law judge before he retired, and he is cautious about quick conclusions.

We wait. The bird is gone. When I get home I will consult my field guides. I have narrowed the possibilities a lot, since I knew enough to look for the wing bars and note the underbelly. Knowing field marks is a basic birding skill, which is acquired with study and experience. Of course, you also have to learn to pick up the key marks in the few seconds the bird comes into view.

A lot of my friends can't figure out why I spend time at this. They smile at me - a lovable eccentric - when I mention birding . But I enjoy learning the skills of spotting and identifying more and more birds. I get a thrill when I see a bird I haven't known before. And birding takes me to beautiful out-of-the-way places - woods, marshes, the Potomac, farm ponds. I can't properly explain to people how much I love being out of doors, away from the house and the city backyard, feeling the weather on my face.

"Sparrows," Joe says. He has wandered off to look for more action. I tag along. Joe is an intense birder, nervous, always alert. Like most experts, he knows the songs, chips and warning calls of many birds and can "call" a bird without seeing it. He has taught me, for example, that chickadees have ten or so different calls and chips, and I 'm beginning to recognize most of them.

Watching my feet, I walk along a rough path, trodden through the weeds by other birders, to a patch of shoulder-high thistle plants. They're brown now, after frost, and loaded with seeds, a buffet for

cardinals, goldfinches and other seed-eating birds.

"Quite a lot of chippies today," Joe says. "Must have been a flight last night." All of us watch to see what new birds will migrate through the Yard each week. Some species migrate in August, some in September, some, like the chipping sparrows, leave home to go south in October. Past generations of birders have documented this- we have a booklet that gives the usual dates -and each day we look for possible new arrivals. If, over time, the birds don't come in expected numbers, we worry because so many bird species are declining as their habitat gets developed.

A loud song rings out behind us. "Tea-ket-tle, Tee-ket-tie." I turn to find a Carolina wren, soft-cinnamon color, sitting on top of the rock pile. Joe pays no attention. Carolina wrens are cheeky, hard-wired birds, and I admire their moxie, but they are common year-round residents and most expert birders simply note the song and move on. The wren will go on Joe's list for the day, but the prize he's seeking is a less common migrant.

"That's four sparrows we have seen today," Joe says with satisfaction. Joe is a dyed-in-the-wool lister. Each morning he keeps a running tally, out loud, of the warblers he has seen ("Six species so far"). He has traveled all over the country solely to find new birds to add to his list of 620 species seen in the U.S. This is a good number; people who reach 600 send their names to the national birding magazine for publication.

The Yard draws a lot of listers, most of them less openly competitive than Joe. People keep lists by state, and even by county. I don't list; I do not

want to be the kind of birder who is so busy looking for a bird for her life list that she hardly sees anything else. This fall I have become more interested in seeing what birds come through the Yard as the weeks go by.

Jim wanders over to join us. Jim is a lister, but he's laid back. Years ago he came to Washington from Tennessee, and there's a hint of Appalachia in his lanky frame and measured speech. His birding style is to walk slowly, stand still, talk little. He goes home every day and lists all the birds we have seen in the Park, keeping a census. He might say with satisfaction, "That makes all four woodpeckers today," but he does not flaunt his successes.

Maury calls out "Red-tailed hawk overhead." Maury is a solitary birder. Much of the time he walks around the Yard by himself, and he often leaves without saying goodbye. He's pleasant - and a good birder - he used to be a lawyer - he has a wife - that's all I know.

As a matter of fact, I don't know much about many of the birders, although they are always friendly. We talk about birds and birding spots, that's all. The regulars show up at sunrise, stay until ten o'clock or so, then leave when the birds begin to scatter. I have no idea what they do the rest of the day. I wonder about this -- do birders tend to be loners? Or is it because they are men, and I am one of the few women. It puzzles me, but I've decided to just enjoy the casual comradeship.

"Feeding flock of cardinals," Jim says quietly, as ten male and female cardinals settle into the thistles for breakfast. A scarlet male cardinal perches on a bending thistle stalk and gives its

penetrating "Cheep." The sound makes me think of my mother, who loved cardinals. Every January, often with snow on the ground, she would look out the kitchen window and say, " Look. The cardinal is singing on top of the telephone pole. It's a sign of spring."

I suppose my love of the outdoors - my feeling of being a different person in the woods - comes from my mother. The family went on picnics on weekends and looked for wildflowers and squirrels in the woods. There was great excitement in our house when the song sparrows nested in the barberry bush. From her, I acquired an observing eye, alert to nuances of the natural world.

Now, even when I am chasing birds, I notice the prickly balls of the Chinese chestnut tree rising

above shiny green leaves, and the beauty of the pokeweed, whose magenta stems carry deep blue berries.

In front of me, I see Joe's shoulders tense, then relax. "Phoebe," he says. The phoebe is sitting on a dead branch, flying out after an insect, then returning to its perch. "Hawking," we call it. Phoebes are pretty common; nothing to get excited about.

Birding's gotten slow, I realize. I tally up 4 sure warblers, 4 sparrows, both kinglets, the woodpeckers, the hawk, and best of all, the possible Tennessee. Plus the red leaves of the woodbine which has climbed high in the yellow maple tree. "Think I'll quit," I say to Jim.

"Me too," he says, companionably. We walk up the trail together.

Zoo Volunteer at Work

Navy blue slacks, navy shirt, name badge, bucket of greens – I have arrived for my Monday morning shift at the Zoo. The greens are for the leafcutter ants — I cut branches this morning from a variety of shrubs to make a nice smorgasbord for them.

It's only 10 o'clock of a summer morning but there is a scattering of visitors in the Invertebrate Exhibit already. A teenage couple stand six feet back from the spider exhibit, looking fearfully at the 2-inch spiders from Madagascar sitting quietly in



Madagascar spider (photo by Jarek Tuzsyriski)

the center of their webs.

There's no glass around this exhibit. I know what they are thinking. "Don't worry," I say, "They are not going to come after you – they're only interested in insects."

"Do they bite? Are they poisonous?" the young woman asks, shrinking into her boyfriend.

"No. When a spider bites its prey, it injects a chemical to paralyze it, but only a few spiders poison people. These don't."

Relieved, but cautious, they walk on.

Spiders are a hard sell. My job as a volunteer is to give the public information about the animals so people understand better what they are seeing and enjoy it.

Most zoo visitors know something about pandas or lions, but invertebrates are the great unknown. Our schools don't seem to teach that there is a huge group of animals without backbones or any bones at all – corals, jellyfish, octopus, lobsters, ants, millipedes, bees, etc. Spiders have been bad-mouthed for so many eons that they scare a lot of visitors.

I open the gate and walk into the back of the exhibit. I still get a kick out of going behind the scenes — I remember those years when I was an ordinary visitor and looked curiously over the coun-

ter gate at the welter of pipes and tanks. Now I'm an insider. I don't notice the continual hum of running water. I know that the Rube Goldberg web of pipes, valves and gauges keeps the water warm for corals, cold for the octopus, salty for starfish, fresh for the diving beetles.

The morning feeding schedule sits on a battered table in the kitchen. Blue crabs at 10:30. Feeding the animals always gets a crowd, and the blue crabs are a popular draw. Taking a little piece of shrimp from the refrigerator, I station myself in front of the tank where a 4-inch blue crab from the Chesapeake Bay hides in the corner.

"Feeding time," I shout, then wait as children and parents gather around.

Holding up the smelly piece of shrimp, "Crabs eat dead fish," I say, "And they have a marvelous sense of smell to find their food. Watch!"

I dip the shrimp in and out of the water. The crab dances theatrically about, then swims

frantically as I drag the shrimp in front of him. The group chortles. "Ahh", they say, as the crab finally gets his pincers on the shrimp and begins to rip it apart.

"Do you know how to tell a male crab from a female?" I ask. (We are supposed to get participation) Puzzled faces. "Look at the underside – if this one has the Washington Monument outlined there it is a male."

A little girl in a pink sunsuit shouts triumphantly, "Male."

"Right" I say. "And the females have the Capitol dome. Intelligent design. Any questions?"

I see I have a few minutes to visit the keepers' office. Donna, our entomologist keeper, is sitting at her computer. "Anything new?" I ask.

"Two new millipedes arrived. The tarantula molted. And," she paused dramatically, "we have baby cuttlefish."

"They hatched!" I say, surprised. The zoo has never raised cuttlefish, and we were skeptical the mating would work, although the female laid 300 eggs.

Back in the kitchen, I study the feeding schedule. The zoo keeps the animals healthy with prescribed and measured diets. The brittlestars, a relative of the starfish, get a brine shrimp cocktail today. The hissing cockroaches got a bowl of lettuce and carrots this morning. The tarantula gets a live cricket. All this is plotted out on a list, where we record whether the animal ate or refused. If an animal seems sick, or gets an infection, the zoo vet is called.

I've gotten used to this careful scientific



Blue crab (photo by greyloch)

schedule and enjoy it. Some friends can't understand my enthusiasm, after a career dedicated to social activism in the labor movement. For thirty years I pretty much lived and breathed my job — training union leadership. When I retired, I wanted to volunteer in a place where I worked with people and kept learning.

"Go green," was a natural choice. Ever since I was a child, I have been interested in "nature." "Listen," my mother would say on a January morning, "the cardinal has begun to sing his spring song." When we went for family picnics in the woods she taught my sisters and me to identify wildflowers and notice the animal tracks.

So, after I retired, I called the zoo. I was told I could be trained and volunteer in either Large Mammals, Reptiles, Inverts, Birds, or Amazonia. Which exhibit to choose? A truly selfless volunteer just wants to make a contribution to society, but I intended to enjoy myself. Invertebrates seemed best. I would be comfortably inside, with air conditioning in the hot months and heat in the winter. I wouldn't be isolated --there were four keepers to talk to and quiz. And, I would be learning about animals I wasn't familiar with.

I work three morning shifts a month, pretty much talking non-stop to the public. By 11:30 I had fed and talked about the spiny lobster, the anemones, the hermit crab and the nautilus. I had shown several families our colony of leafcutter ants. It was time to feed the male cuttlefish.

I've been intrigued by the behavior of this male over the last ten months, as I've watched him grow

from 2 inches to 8. He is a member of the same group as the octopus, though he looks a lot like a flat fish, with big heavy-lidded eyes, and a frilly fin around his body. His major defense against predators, and the most unusual aspect of his behavior, is lightning-quick changes of color and pattern,

This particular one is an aggressive go-getter when it comes to food, so he lives in a tank by himself. "Come see me feed our amazing cuttlefish," I shout several times in a Barnum and Bailey fashion. By now the exhibit is crowded and noisy — teenagers, families, small children underfoot, and cameras flashing.

"Watch closely when I put this piece of shrimp in the water. He'll smell it. Right now he has a big white band across his brown back, but he'll change."

In a flash he shoots out his tentacles and takes the shrimp. Cameras pop.

"Why does he change color?" asks a grandfather with a small boy at his side.

"We think its camouflage — he tries to blend into the background rocks to fool predators," I say. "Now he's in his tiger-striped mode. Notice the white sweatband that has appeared over his eyes. And he's squinched up his tentacles to make his face a fearsome Halloween mask. Amazing."

I never tire of the cuttlefish. Animals like him keeps the zoo interesting, since I never know what behavior I will see. I've found that these so-called lower animals have amazing chemical and physical characteristics. I never knew, for example, that

butterflies have a 2 inch thread-like tongue that shoots out to suck nectar from flowers. Who would have thunk it?

The zoo visitors are a plus too. During every shift, there are interesting conversations with people of all ages and knowledge. Today, as I fed the prawn, a woman from Paris translated my comments into French for her 12 year old son. A family of three from Texas thanked me for explaining how spiders make silk. . A little boy told me that the ctenophores, a relative of the jellyfish, gather up food like SpongeBob. Two tall teenagers in corn rows stood entranced watching the octopus use its eight arms to dance across the tank. Each

shift I meet people like these from all over the country. And I'm teaching — sort of like my old job.

Still, summer crowds are tiring. It's 12:45. I'm glad I'll be off at one. As I pause in front of the male cuttlefish for one last time, a pleasant-faced older woman says to me enthusiastically, "This is marvelous. My daughter and I volunteer at the Brandywine zoo. You have many more animals. We don't have cuttlefish."

A shot of energy bolts through me. "Come, let me show you the cuttlefish eggs and the new babies," I say, picking up a flashlight. "You can't see that everyday."



Cuttlefish (photo by Meghan Murphy)

The Butterfly Watcher

I left the meeting carrying an instruction sheet and four little stakes topped with orange flags. I felt like virtue incarnate.

I had volunteered to take part in a scientific butterfly survey: I was going to identify and count the species of butterflies that came into in my urban yard in the summer. “Think globally, act locally.”

The National Zoo and its Conservation Center in the mountains of northern Virginia were making a study to find out which butterfly species are able to live in urban habitats, in the suburbs and in the rural countryside. The Project expected to find more species thriving in the country, because of the habitat loss that city development brings, but they needed to document just what was happening. Over the years this project might also find whether there was a general decline in butterfly populations or in specific species. Data was needed, since scientists had already found 5 species of butterfly that had become extinct in North America in the last 50 years.

We were to be “citizen scientists,” and the instructions were strict – observe one hour a week, for six weeks, between 10 am and 5 pm, best on a sunny day, in an area exactly 500 square meters. For me, the first step was to plot out the 500 square meters in the back yard and put an orange-flagged

stake at each corner. Then, no cheating, do not count anything outside that area, in the neighbor's yard, say.

I was reared on feet, so 500 square meters was a mystery. The backyard is 54.5 feet wide -- those feet had to be converted to inches and then to meters, then that number divided into 500, and those meters converted back into feet. Thank god for the calculator- it told me that I needed 96.9 feet back of the house.

‘With yardstick in hand, I measured back through the grass and past the 20X30 foot garden in one corner of the lawn. That was the easy part. The next 30 feet went through azalea bushes, down 15 feet of a rocky slope and then into the ground-cover of the unkempt “woodland” below. Keeping an eye out for poison ivy, I stuck the stakes into the ground. Enough citizen science already! Time for a glass of wine.

The survey was to start the first week in July. Eleven o'clock on July 7 found me sitting in the shade on the back lawn, tally sheet and butterfly guide in my lap. It was sunny, as advised, in fact it was hot, 78 degrees. I noted time, temperature and weather data on my tally sheet, and looked around.

There were two white cabbage butterflies dancing over the pink zinnias. Common — easy to

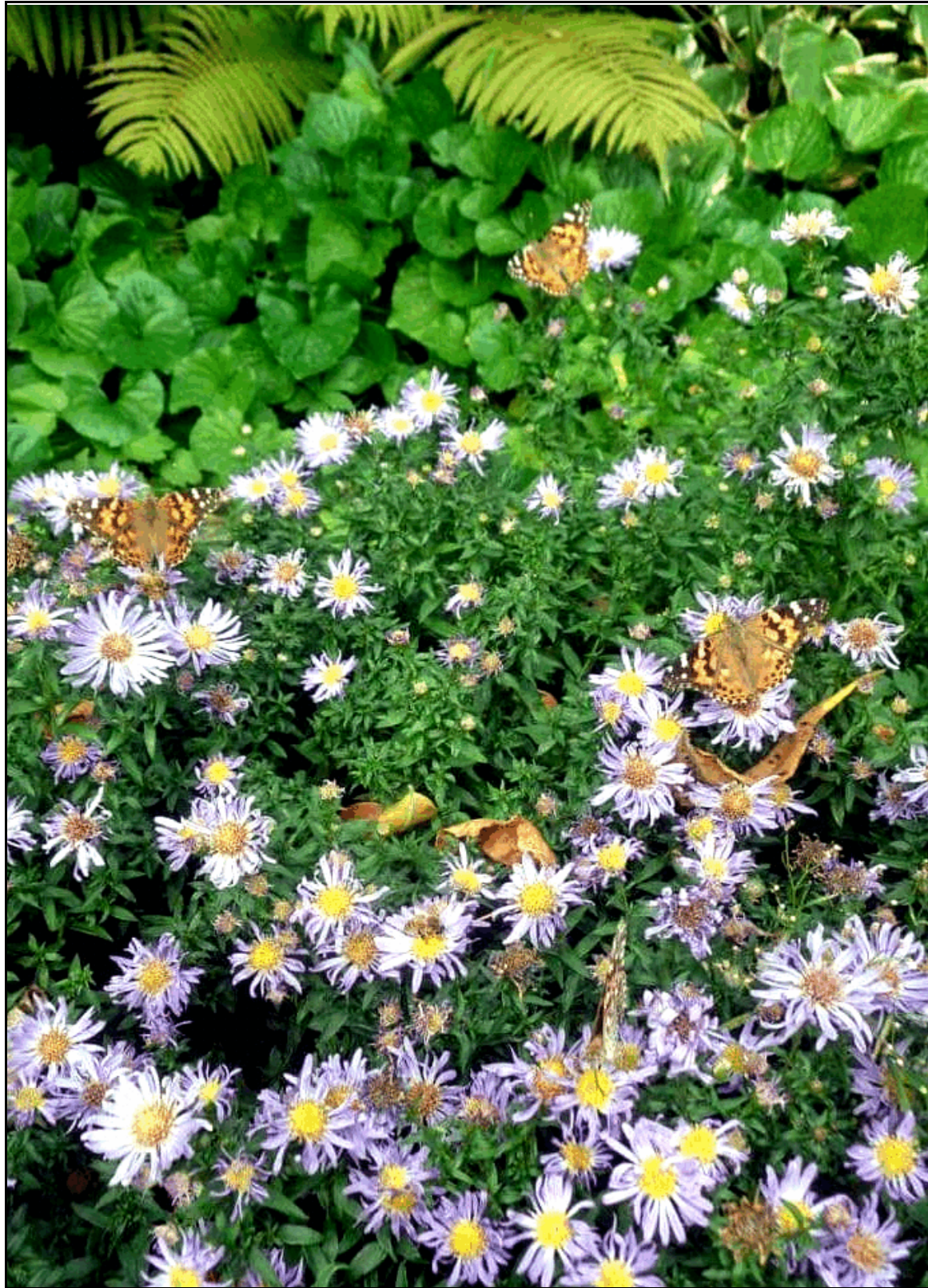


photo by Sarah Conezio

identify — I put two ticks near that name on the tally sheet. We could count more than one butterfly in a species only if we saw them at the same time – the powers that be did not want us counting the same butterfly twice!

A yellow swallowtail dropped out of the sky, danced a bit, then settled delicately on the blossom tip of the butterfly bush. A lovely big butterfly, yellow with black stripy markings, it presented a perfect photo op on the purple blossom.

I got up and walked into the vegetable area, since the instructions urged observers to patrol the 500 meters on foot every ten minutes or so. Out of the corner of my eye I saw a flick, then a small pale-bluish butterfly settled on a leaf. I edged closer. The butterfly flew up in the air, zigged a bit, lit fifteen feet away. I remembered that there were two possibilities in blues — how did you tell them apart? Ah, one had little tails and was called the little tailed blue. Whoops! The butterfly rose over the tomato plants and sailed over the fence. Hmm. I would have to settle for “unidentified blue.”

It was time to face facts — a butterfly would not sit still while I racked my brain — or ran to get the field guide. Quick ID was a scientific imperative. In all there are 13,000 butterfly and moth species in North America. The designers of our survey had thoughtfully selected just the 33 species that they thought we might see in our area. To ID them, I needed to study the picture guide on size, color, pattern and the particular ID marks that make it possible to tell similar species apart.

Resolving to study when I got out of the heat, I

reviewed the tally sheet for the first day's observation -- one yellow swallowtail, two cabbage, one unidentified blue. Poor pickings. Citizen science was a slow slog. Maybe next week?

The second week, the porch thermometer registered 83 degrees when I went out for the survey. My mind flashed to an old etching of a scientist/explorer in a pith helmet hacking his way through the jungle, sweat dripping. I settled into the lawn chair. Think of Livingston, Stanley and the others who charted new paths — it was no picnic — I admonished myself.

Just then, a black swallowtail lit on the daisies. Challenge! There are four kinds of black swallowtails possible in our area. To determine which one, I had to see whether this butterfly had two rows of orange dots on its hind underwing, or just one. I moved out of the shade to get closer. The butterfly jitterbugged from one blossom to another, taking a sip of nectar here and another there. I walked around to the other side of the bush keeping my shadow behind me, as I had seen lion hunters do on TV. The butterfly lit, folded its wings for 20 seconds and allowed me to see two rows of orange dots. Its size helped me be sure it was a black swallowtail, a new species for my tally.

Just what I always wanted. A friend of mine had told me that a female black swallowtail had laid eggs on a row of parsley in her garden. She was enjoying ten little striped caterpillars munching the parsley and growing fast. I wanted that too. Scientists have found that every species of butterfly has one or two favorite host plants, and that's all its

caterpillars will eat. Black swallowtails look for plants in the parsley/Queen Anne's Lace family for their eggs, and I had a supply growing, just in case.

The temperature continued to rise. I mopped the sweat out of my eyes. I remembered the photo I had seen at the meeting — one observer lying supine in a hammock while his three children darted about collecting the data. It had seemed a bit underhanded, but at 86 humid degrees I understood it.

A little blue job skipped low over the lawn, nectaring on one clover blossom, then another. It was only about ½ inch long. With its wings folded, I could see a tiny threadlike tail coming out from each hind wing, plus the telltale orange dot near the body. A tailed little blue. Tick.

Three yellow swallowtail played around the flowers, tick, tick, tick, then somnolence settled over the rest of the yard. Boring. I was disappointed — I had planted lots of flowers that butterflies were supposed to use for nectaring. Where were they?

The tally for that hot second week was low again, but as the July weeks passed, the heat diminished. I relaxed, and began to enjoy my hour in new ways. The catbird splashed vigorously in the birdbath. A frog hopped in the ferns. Goldfinches perched on the swaying stems of the foxglove to get the tiny seeds. Once in a while a dragonfly scouted the area, hunting insects back and forth over the lawn.

The bees were busy all day long. Usually five or six bumblebees were gathering pollen from the garden flowers. I could see the yellow glob of

pollen, a bit bigger than a pin head at the top of each of the two hind legs. They were collecting it, flower by flower, and taking it to the nest for food. There were big bumblebees, an inch long, and smaller ones only a half inch, all of them working hard in a no-nonsense fashion that time-study experts would applaud.

I couldn't see many honeybees. Perhaps Washington was afflicted with the mysterious problem that was causing the decline of honeybees all over the U.S. I worried --would my flowers — and the vegetable crop — get pollinated?

The entomologist at the Zoo reassured me. For the home gardener, the decline of honey bees is not likely to be a big problem. Before the British colonists came to America, everything was pollinated by native insects or our 4000 kinds of native bees. Honey bees aren't native — they had been domesticated in Europe for centuries, and the early colonists brought hives in order to get honey, which our native bees do not make.

Her words rang true. As the summer wore on, I could see that everything in the garden was getting pollinated. Cucumbers and squash were forming, tomatoes were ripening, and the plants in the flowerbeds were making seeds. Bees, flies, ants, wasps, butterflies and beetles were doing the job.

The butterfly tally picked up as July moved into August. Several orange monarchs visited the garden. They neutered, but left no eggs, since there were no host milkweeds. One week I got a viceroy — a look-alike for the monarch. Gradually I added an

American lady, a clouded sulphur, a grey hairstreak, and an azure blue to my tally. During the last survey, in late August, the butterfly bush hosted seven yellow swallowtails at one time, a magical sight.

As I prepared to turn in my tally for the summer, I counted a total of nine different species I had seen during the six weeks. Our web site told me that was pretty good for the city. People in the suburbs saw an average of 11, and people out in the rural wilds of Virginia were averaging 16. It's not surprising that butterflies do not do as well in the city, where lawns

are manicured, weedy plants abolished, and few people have real gardens. By our survey citizen scientists were helping document this.

It was a sad day in August when I finished the tally sheet, filed the instructions, and pulled up the stakes. I felt let down — I was just a plain citizen again.

But I'll be ready if the Zoo has another survey next year. I'm going to buy a new khaki field hat (pith helmets no longer available), and wait for the call.



photo by Joy Allchin

On Brandywine Street

The houses are boxy, brick or frame. Substantial, not showy, they sit well back from the street, azaleas by the doorways. It's an older neighborhood, with homes built fifty or more years ago by middle-class professionals — lawyers, government workers, doctors. My house, a two-story brick, was built by a successful plumbing contractor.

Although the houses are well-kept and comfortable, the glory of this neighborhood is the trees. One hundred years ago this part of Washington was woodland and wildflowers. Many of the hundred-foot oaks still stand. When I look out my living room window, I see a huge oak across the street, its branches spreading high over the house roof below. A month ago the leaves were gold against the sky.

When my husband and I bought the house, we were pleased with the green of the neighborhood, but we were mainly looking for more room and more space to garden. That was 45 years ago. In the years since, the “woods” have become essential as breath to me — I watch for the resident birds at the feeder, listen for the frogs in spring, delight in the rare glimpse of a fox moving across the lawn next door.

When we decided to buy the house, we didn't think much about the “neighbors”, assuming we

would get along. Now, many years later, I would hate to leave the people and the neighborhood, which is embedded in the fabric of our lives.

Across the street are Laurie and Adam, who moved in with their two young children twenty years ago. We trade cookies at Christmas, take in packages for each other. She designs beautiful quilts, and I admire them over coffee in her kitchen. I give her tomato plants for the garden, and Adam, skilled at carpentry, occasionally fixes my tools. We aren't close friends, but wonderful neighbors.

Seventeen years ago, I looked out the window at the house next door and watched a couple coming up the front walk, carrying a basket with a little baby. Michael and Renee have been here ever since. Michael and I talk over the fence about house problems, teen-age angst, and city politics — he brings us donuts from the discount shop, I prune their bushes, and I know that he's there in any emergency.

On the other side of the house is Joe, 95 years old, with round-the-clock caretakers. When I first knew him he was a successful lawyer, and he and his wife were often away on expensive cruises. Now his memory is poor, and he walks with difficulty. I drop over and sit with him at the television—he needs visitors and he still knows me.

As other neighbors who were part of my life

have moved away or died, new people have moved in. For a time we had no young children on the street, but in the last ten years we have gained five families with young children. Diversity — we also now have an African- American couple, and a gay cardiologist with a big dog.

Laurie and I are welcoming committee — I bake date-nut bread and take it over; she bakes sweet rolls. Michael just knocks on the door and offers help — a meaningful offer since he's realtor who knows a lot about house repairs.

We are the outgoing ones — most of the new people are aloof. hey have busy lives — both parents work, the kids are in private schools and absorbed in today's whirls of activity. It's hard to get to know them. I wonder whether the sense of neighborly community has gone. Or is it just individual differences — the way people grew up?

Of course, one reason I expect to know neighbors is the way I grew up on a street in the Cleveland suburbs in the 1930's. There, the mothers stayed home, they knew one another, felt easy running to borrow a cup of sugar or an egg. Fathers cut the lawns, put up the screens, on Saturdays got the hose out and washed the car. Children roller skated on the sidewalks. We all went to public schools, even when it took a streetcar or bus ride. There was no chauffeuring, no soccer, no TV, no computers, and movies on Saturday afternoon only.

Brandywine Street was probably much like that in the 1920's and 30's. When we moved in, in 1968, an older couple lived across the street in the house where they had raised two children. Stimmie and

his father had built the house in 1922. Their daughters went to the local elementary (still in operation), skated on a pond formed by damming the creek at the foot of my yard, babysat for the neighbors.

Stimmie, a physicist, and Florence, who worked as an astronomer before she became a mother and housewife, were different from my parents. Like my parents, theirs was a middle-class household, thrifty, hardworking, but, unlike my family, they were also hikers and naturalists in what would become the Earth Day mode. In their younger days they took a streetcar to the end of the line in Glen Echo, hiked a mile and camped next to the Potomac River. They spent weekends there, cooking meals, swimming in the river, with their daughters and friends. Stimmie had made a cradleboard, so they could carry a baby on their backs, long before this was fashionable.

There was a huge garden on the back slope of their lot, and they plowed it each spring with an ingenious contraption only a physicist could rig. Stimmie guided the plow and Florence supplied the power by driving the car up and down the alley. Stimmie planted all sorts of vegetables there, and Florence canned them.

I often spent the afternoon with Florence, sitting at the dining room table, looking out at the big oak where the squirrels played. Although her legs wouldn't let her garden anymore, she provided expert advice on garden problems. She was also a self-taught naturalist. Often I would bring a twig or a flower that we had found in the woods and ask

her to identify it. She would take down the field guide and carefully key it out, then write the name and date in the book's margin.

I marveled at Stimmie and Florence, feeling lucky to know a couple with a different focus than I was used to. They died thirty years ago, but I think of them whenever I look at the trees across the street.

Nowadays the street is lively with children on tricycles and teenagers with cell phones. We don't chat as much, but we do have one real community event — SNOW. A good snowfall brings everyone out. There is a festive atmosphere, as we shovel blocked driveways and pitch in on the sidewalks. We work together to free cars socked in by the snowplow and curse the city and its personnel. When our backs tire, we lean on our shovels and talk. Camaraderie reigns for the day.

Then everyone goes back to normal. The adults wave to one another, and we all get on with our separate lives. Things don't seem as friendly to me, but I know that times change.

Now that we are in our eighties, relatives and friends politely urge Jack and me to think about a nice retirement home. No stress. No blocked toilets, no power outages, no trash cans to lug. Should we leave?

No way.



Cat Lore

Last week I realized that I want another cat. I haven't had a cat for almost a year, ever since Jeff, my feisty black one-year-old, was killed by a car. I missed him for several months, then settled into a comfortable period when I was free of the obligations of cat care.

"Another cat?" my husband asked. "Why?" I didn't try to answer. My immediate thought was that I wanted someone else around the house, but that didn't seem a wifely response.

I already felt vaguely guilty. My Puritan heritage taught me not to be self-indulgent. I know very well that it is people, not animals, who deserve time and attention.

His question rankled. I thought with pleasure about my past cats, Bryndl and Jeff, then tried to remember what my days had been like when each one of them had been part of the household.

It's like having a third person around the house, I decided. I love my secure brick house, where the sun streams through the multi-paned windows, and lights the teak Scandinavian furniture we've had since the 1950's. There's a visual high when I walk in the door and see the yellow dining room table on the red Oriental rug. It's home, but it seems lonesome.

There's not much action with only two people in

a big house. No one to talk to. This must be what sociologists refer to as the isolation of the nuclear family, or the alienation of the 1990's. Whatever the theory, a cat helps solve the problem. I want to walk in the house and say "Where are you?", knowing that the cat will walk slowly into the front hall, arching its back to get the sleep out of its bones.

The cat books will tell you that cats are creatures of routine, that they are independent, and devoted to places more than people. While all this is true, I have discovered over the years that each cat writes a poem under and around these generalizations. Every cat is different and that is the "mystery" that intrigues people.

My first cat was Bryndl, so named because she was several colors of ginger and white and so » brindled," I thought. The word reminded me of Dylan Thomas and Wales — I'm sure there was a brindled cat in one of his poems —and I spelled the cat's name with a y because the Welsh use a lot of y's. Actually, it turned out that brindled means streaked grey and this cat was a beautiful caramel and white, but I liked the sonorous sound of Bryndl and stuck with the name.

I found Bryndl on my doorstep one day when I had moved into a new house. She was hungry and meowed pathetically. I took her in because she

needed me. She was half-grown, already very pretty. Later, I found out that she was a teenage mother; she had already had a litter of kittens,

I never ceased to delight in Bryndl's beauty. She was a small cat, delicate in bones and in movement, with a way of picking up each long leg and setting it down that reminded me of the grace in those slow-motion videos of racetrack horses.

When she sat on her haunches on the windowsill, the long rounded line of her back leading to the small head with ears upraised, she was a replica of the lovely statue of Nefertiti's cat. She was old enough to know her own mind. She would lie on the oak floor, warm from the sun coming in the south window, licking the bottom of one paw, then another, her grooming businesslike and absorbed. When I walked by, she might raise her head briefly, but I always felt she was busy taking care of herself and I was not expected to intervene.

That's one reason I've come to like cats, They don't expect much — you don't have to worry about ignoring them or hurting their feelings or leaving them alone to go off to the movies. A real human being in the house. whether family or company, demands a lot of sensitive relating, but a cat just lies down somewhere comfortable and sleeps when you are absorbed in your own life.

Bryndl was good company. If I was working at my desk, she would walk silently into the room and go to sleep on the chair. At night, with TV on, I would invite her up on my lap and she would sleep in a ball, vibrating with a low purr and warming my



Bryndl

legs. When I talked to myself, out loud, Bryndl simply fixed her yellow eyes on me and listened, without comment.

There were disadvantages, of course. There was cat hair on most of the soft chairs, even though she was supposed to restrict herself to one. She kicked her kitty litter all over the basement floor. She could be stubborn when she didn't want to come back in the house and hide out under a bush while we called and worried and had to go to bed anxious.

Like all cats, Bryndl loved the outdoors. She marched around the yard, chasing occasional squirrels or chipmunks, although she never caught much of anything. Watching her try to catch a butterfly was grace in motion. She would prance across the lawn, head up, eyes on the butterfly, then rise on her hind legs and leap up in an effortless arc like Suzanne Farrell. For a moment she would be suspended in air, vertical, before she

made a quick landing, and then another fluid jump.

When Bryndl died of a bad heart and old age, I was lonesome without her company. I missed her beauty and her quirky meows. I had no one to turn to when I was down in the dumps. My husband was sympathetic, but he was so used to my anxieties that he couldn't take them seriously. Bryndl had simply looked at me and snuggled against my shoulder.

A year went by, then someone told me about a friend with kittens. "Aha," I thought, I will get a young cat and bring it up properly, loving and obedient. I agonized over the litter of five kittens and finally selected a glossy black kitten, with green eyes. I named him Jeff after my favorite President, Thomas Jefferson.

He came home in an Easter egg basket lined with a washcloth. He was tiny and a little wobbly on his legs, and at first he spent a lot of time curled up on his back in the Easter basket, sleeping.

I had some definite ideas about how to train him. Although I don't have children, I had observed how my friends deal with their pre-scholars. I also had the philosophy I use in my work career of training adults. Jeff needed structure --clear rules and clear expectations but he also must have freedom and autonomy to develop his creativity.

He had to sleep in the basement, could not jump on the table or kitchen counters, must not scratch the furniture — rules. He would have to learn not to bite or scratch people. Beyond that I thought I'd try to go with the flow.

What I hadn't bargained for was his youth. He

had a lot more energy than Bryndl. He explored ceaselessly. Every niche in the house, every new bag of groceries, every paper pitched into the wastebasket, required investigation. If there was a shoe left on the floor, it was live prey, to be pawed and shaken and gummed.

He had kilowatt hours to burn. I brought out the old cat toys and started to play with him — something I felt he must need for his development. Just the ticket!

I found myself running in a circle through the rooms of the house, dragging a frayed rope behind me. He would hide under a chair and have me walk by him, unaware, so he could rush out and grab the rope end and thrash it to death.

It was wearing. Why didn't he amuse himself with a catnip mouse or rolling ping pong ball? No, he expected a playmate, and I was the only game in town. I would lay down the newspaper, pick up the rope and dangle it behind the spindles of the bannister where he had to work to swat it.

I had though I could keep him inside — too many cars on the street. But as he grew older, I couldn't do it. I knew that I would hate to be cooped up in a house and never go out into green world and blue sky. With some misgivings, I let him out the door and watched as he cautiously sniffed the grass and bushes for the first time, then toured the perimeter of the yard.

He had found his destiny. From then on, a small black tiger prowled in the grassy savannah of the backyard. I would see him streaking across the garden, intent on a chipmunk. He learned to sit

under a bush near the birdbath for hours, seemingly sleepy, waiting for an unwary bird to come to drink. Occasionally, he caught a vole, which he deposited on the front step of the porch, as an offering to show me his prowess.

He was endlessly busy. When tired, he rested under an azalea bush and surveyed his territory, just like the sated lions in videos of Africa.

I have always been fascinated by tigers and I admired his independence, but I saw that I .had become just a convenience. He jumped onto the counter and ate leftovers when the mood struck him. When yelled at, he did not bow his head in shame and run to the basement. I felt lucky if he jumped up on the foot of the bed and joined me in an afternoon nap. I comforted myself with his health and his energy — hoping he would grow more affectionate as age set in. I admired his black beauty, the glossy body with head held high trotting

purposefully up the driveway. I began to enjoy observing a little tiger in action, and I gave up on the idea that he would be another Bryndl.

Then, one morning he ran out into the street, and a car killed him instantly. I cried. I felt a sense of waste — all that youth and curiosity and energy gone in less than a minute. We buried him in the back yard, and I put cats out of my mind.

But now, a year later, I have decided to get another cat. Not a kitten. I want one with a little life experience behind her. I hope she will curl up on my lap and sleep. I look forward to watching her lope bow-legged down the stairs and jog across the lawn hunting grasshoppers.

For this, I will vacuum cat-hair off the chairs and buy the kind of cat food she likes. I will worry about her health and puzzle over her motives and talk to her when I can't sleep.

That's a cat.

Sister

"Ditzy". That's the word. My sister Joy is *ditzy*.

What a relief to find that word. It implies odd, a bit eccentric even, but not enough to be concerned about.

I had begun to worry, several days into my visit. Everything was such a production. We couldn't go for a walk without clothes for wind, hat and sunscreen for sun, boots in case it was wet underfoot, water in case we got thirsty, and anything else we might need to survive a tsunami. I couldn't leave a wet washcloth in the shower because it might bring mold. The wrong lid on a pot brought disaster.

I was tired of being warned about my magnesium and my B-12. The protein and carbs were getting me down. We couldn't eat a meal without the right amount of each. If the restaurant couldn't provide them, she wanted to leave. I suggested we just get the protein when we got home. No way.

And I couldn't have any ice cream because desserts upset the balance of something.

Daily life was full of problems. She is sure the cleaning lady will not be on time, she fears that the dogs next door will bark, the accountant will make mistakes on the income tax, the restaurant will be closed, her tape recorder is going to die. Crumbs on the floor mean an immediate dash for the

dustbuster. She is upset with her movie group because they show violent movies, and mad at her book club because some selections are trash.

Very normal, when I write it here, but boring. I don't want to hear it, certainly not more than once.

This talk about nothing is not really new, but I began to ask myself, why am I visiting her? I do it partly because it's family. She's eighty years old, she's divorced with no children, she lives alone, across the continent from the rest of the family. And I'm responsible -I am the oldest of the three sisters and supposed to watch over the others.

The truth is that I visit in part because she lives in a beautiful part of California, three blocks from the sea. I go in the early spring when Washington is grey and slushy but California is already sunny, and the birding and the wild life are spectacular.

Talk, talk, trivia, trivia. Four days into the visit, I could feel myself getting crabby. Then I took myself in hand. I asked myself -what did I enjoy about her?

She's a great walking companion. We share a deep interest in the natural world, and that's not so common. We spend much of our visit in the woods or along the ocean, watching for birds, seals, otters, butterflies. Joy's an expert on tide pool life. I'm an trail mix. Both of us are thrilled to find blue herons building a nest high in a pine tree overlooking the avid birder. We walk the trails, munch apples and



ocean. Both of us will stand for 15 minutes watching an otter floating on its back using a little stone to crack an abalone shell.

Close to her house, we walk along the dunes, waves crashing on the rocks to one side, sea blue as paradise, and call out the names of the wildflowers in bloom -sea thrift, rocket, poppy, footsteps of spring. If there is one we don't know, we look closely (no picking), then get out the wildflower book when get home.

This love of nature began in our childhood, when my mother would point out the bird singing in the back tree, the first violet to bloom.

In the family classification, Joy has always been the dancing and music sister. I was the oldest and the smart one, no good at sports or much of anything else except books. My middle sister, Nancy, was the arts-and-crafts one, although she

did manage to make Phi Beta Kappa. Joy could play the piano by ear, and she began ballet lessons in elementary school, so she was "arty." I well remember watching her when she put "Tales of the Vienna Woods." on the record player and pirouetted around the living room.

The old days stick with us.

When I visit, music plays softly at breakfast, while we sit in her dining room and watch for the hummingbirds at the feeder. At dinner time, I can choose a Beethoven sonata, a Carreras aria, or someone from my past like Pete Seeger.

Evenings we're happy to stay home, sitting in two comfortable chairs from our home of long ago, enjoying a video from her personal library. She's been taping programs for twenty-five years -mainly nature programs, dancing, ice skating. We can go under the sea with Monterey Aquarium scientists, or watch Barishnikov dance to Sinatra songs, or see the grace of Torvill and Dean on skates.

During the day, we go out walking and exploring in the mornings, returning early enough in the afternoon that I can have my nap. Naps are one of my few obsessions —everyone who knows me is aware that I must have my nap. This gives us space and gives Joy time to pursue her musts — 30 minutes of piano practice, 20 minutes of meditation.

The nap gives me the opportunity to look at her catalogs. She's a catalog junkie — clothing for the woman who doesn't want to iron, exotic spices, handy household aids, kitchen gadgets, and home medical remedies. Over the years she has supplied me with discoveries like a sponge that removes cat hair, a CD opener, bag clippers, glue that won't

stop, pocket stain remover, bowl covers for arthritic hands, flashlights for hurricanes, and other products out of my ken. I don't understand spending all this time on such trivia, but I appreciate the results.

My naptime favorite is the "Foot Support" catalog. She handed it to me when I mentioned that two of my toes were rubbing. Who would have believed that there were so many different kinds of foot problems.? Now that I have seen pages of splints and pads for painful toes, fallen arches, hurt heels, as well as aids for corns and bunions, I'm prepared for whatever might happen to my feet in the future. And I solved my toe problem.

We sail along for a week, time enough to get back in touch with each other. She was sad when we said goodbye at the airport. She's convinced I am going to die first, because I am older. I was wondering whether "ditzy" was a real problem.

Sitting on the plane, I worried. She has always been the fun one in the family, the one who loves parades, Halloween, fancy Christmas wrappings, dancing at elegant balls, dressing up for costume parties — what I admire and love about her. My other sister and I are deadly serious. Now Joy's fun is shadowed by this preoccupation with trivia and lost in a continual rat-a-tat of anxiety. I am sad the fun is gone.

I was still puzzling over this after I got home.

I know that she is alone, and I have a husband to complain to, day in and day out. He listens, says soothing things like "It'll be ok," or "It's only money." Joy has no echo at home, and she pours out a" her frustrations when I come to visit.

Deeper than that, I see that she likes to "play,"

and many of the things she loves to do just aren't available anymore. She has no husband to go dancing with, and costume parties decline sharply when you are eighty. That must be why she took up belly dancing five years ago — and then had to give it up because of arthritis. She marches to a different drummer than I do, but old age is limiting us both.

Yesterday, I talked to her on the phone. She was explaining the trouble she is having using her frequent flyer miles to go somewhere, a saga I have heard before. I leaned back and listened, making soothing little sympathetic "umm's." That's my role.



January is the Cruellest Month

I have always hated January. A grey, sullen month. Dark in the morning, dark before dinner. Nothing to do in the garden, and the birding has slowed to a few winter residents. I worry that icy sidewalks will keep me housebound.

It's a month of marking time, just waiting for life to pick up. So over the years I've developed a strategy to keep me busy, make the month pass. Right after Jan. 1, 2013, I put my usual plan into action.

First, I got on the phone and scheduled all those necessary annual checkups of body, skin and teeth. They are such a nuisance in good weather. Then I sat down with a cup of coffee and made a list of must-dos and should-dos that had been nagging me. Every householder knows this list only too well, the messy basement, the little leak in the attic, the missing doormat, etc, etc, etc.

The list is a reproach -and an incentive. I set out to tackle it with the Swiss cheese method which I learned in time management school. "If a job looms large, just take a bite out of it, make a hole in it."

This year I started with the pantry. I went through the shelves and threw out all those cans and packages dated "best eaten" by 2009, 2010 and 2011. One can of fruit had been quietly molding since 2004, a tribute to procrastination.

The list over next two weeks. The basement was cleaned and swept, the roofer had put on 30 new slates, my husband had new Jockey shorts and sox (courtesy of the Internet), and I had two new smoke detectors ready to go up.

I felt virtuous, but bored. Then, the morning of January 14, I got up early and looked out the window to see a vibrant orange glow in the sky behind the houses across the street. Soon streaks of pink rose above it., almost like sunset. My spirits rose; here was a lovely light even before 7:00 am. The days were lengthening; I found out in the newspaper that every day the sun was coming up almost a minute earlier and setting a minute later.

Later that day, when I went out to the store, I saw that the winter jasmine on the corner was covered with small yellow blossoms. I was heartened, but not fooled. Snow will fall and the creeks will rise.

Back at my list, I tackled the library cupboard, throwing out several years worth of seed catalogs, AAA guides, and old telephone books. Then I got down on the kitchen floor with a Phillips-head screw driver and fixed the runners on the kitchen drawers, a gymnastic feat. I decided to get the doorbell fixed, after five years of silence, and called the electrician.

The next morning at breakfast, I was pondering how to get the smoke detectors up, when I heard

bird song. Surprised, I opened the front door to hear a cardinal singing tentatively "Cheer, cheer". He was off-sync, just trying it out for spring nesting season, but he was earlier than usual. When I called my friend in Rock Creek Park to check, he said he had heard a tufted titmouse singing "Peter, Peter," its spring song. "It's the warm weather," he said.

Whether due to global warming or not, this

January has been far more pleasant than most. On January 19, the yellow aconite in my front yard began to bloom. It seemed that I had given January a bad rap. But how long would it keep up?

On January 22 the temperature dropped to the 20's and it is predicted to go lower. The list is calling again The attic remains in pristine chaos. And there are all sorts of financial papers that have to go to the shredder. But February is only a week off — perhaps spring will come knocking again.



A Morning of Birding

In front of us lies the broad Potomac River — blue-grey and tranquil. In the distance, the far shore is a misty ribbon of many colors -trees in muted rust, gold, green and red. At our feet, the water makes low sucking sounds as the receding tide hits the rocks. I smell that wet green smell of river water.

Sally and I have come out for a morning of birding. Now, scanning the river with our binoculars, we see, on a log out in the water, ungainly black silhouettes with long thin necks and bat-like wings held out to dry. Cormorants. Beyond floats a raft of ducks, too far out to identify. We put our scopes down, adjust the legs, squint.

The ducks are shovelers — a hundred or more. They have rusty sides and green heads and bills like spatulas, which they use to "shovel" vegetation from the bottom into their mouths. They have come down from the north to spend the winter here. They are bobbing on the swell, looking cheerful and happy, paying no attention to the traffic stuck on the Woodrow Wilson Bridge. It is almost miraculous to see them so close to the city.

Is this a spiritual experience? The ducks down from Canada, the grey sheet of the river with grass at our feet-the tranquillity is a sharp contrast to the everyday scenes and the everyday anxieties of my life. I have turned the page: I feel part of a different world — the ecology world — where nature is in charge. I am a small being in a complicated whorl I don't control.

I try to go blank when I am birding. I focus on seeing and hearing and smelling, a mindset that takes me away from personal worries or unsettling TV news. But is this spiritual?

It is a mistake to see birding as a time for contemplative, tranquil communion with nature. Birders do not simply walk along enjoying the breeze and the sun and the good earth smells. No, they are watching every second for the flick of motion that tells them a bird has flown in, or the "chee" that says there is a bird in the bush. When a bird is spotted, it must be identified -is that a pintail or a shoveler? Is that trill a cardinal or a mockingbird? Birding is partly the thrill of the chase. It is too tense to be spiritual.

That November morning Sally and I had started our birding at Hunting Creek, which flows into the Potomac just below Alexandria. All birders know that certain spots are "productive." We know that when the tide is out, it is usually worth taking a look at the exposed mud flats in Hunting Creek and the River nearby.

We met in an apartment parking lot. Dressed warmly in windproof pants and jackets over our usual layers of clothing, we embraced awkwardly, and I had a sudden vision of overstuffed astronauts touching on the moon. Walking carefully up onto the highway, we set our spotting scopes on the shoulder overlooking the Creek.

It was a scene satisfying to a birder. There were

pintail ducks, snoozing on the flats with their heads tucked under their wings. Ring-billed gulls tramped around in the mud, and laughing gulls stood solemnly in the shallow water. I saw a painting, all shades of grey and white and black against the dark brown mud of the flat, with a fringe of dull green reeds beyond.

A group of pale gray Forster's terns sat small and delicate among the gulls. Suddenly they rose and flew in unison over the creek. We could see the narrow pointed wings, the fanned forked tail, the graceful flight as they rose up, then down, then arced overhead. Finally, they settled back on the flat together, jockeying for position a little, all facing the same way. Another miraculous sight.

Next we crossed the highway, to scan the Potomac. Looking over the parapet, we found two swans. One was a bit bigger than the other, one had orange on the beak and one didn't, both carried their heads on the sinuous curved necks that speak grace. Tundra swans or mute swans? Here Sally, the detail woman, was in her glory. Turning to the bird book, she pondered the color of the backs, the shape of the beaks, the size. Tundra swans, she decided. Mentally, she was checking them off on her species list for the day.

That is another unspiritual thing that birders do. They keep lists of birds they have seen in their lifetime, or lists of birds found in their backyard or lists of birds they have managed to see in one county in one year, etc. Some of this listing is competitive — "I saw more different birds in Maryland in 1998 than you did." Some of it is like setting hurdles for yourself — "Where can I get that

Connecticut warbler for my life list?"

That is not my sort of thing. Listing feels too prosaic. I prefer to wonder where the swans spent the summer. What "tundra" are they from?. Seeing the long white necks probing for food in a green islet of vegetation is a mental photo I want to keep. Is that a spiritual moment?

Sally and I finished the morning at a picnic table in the park. An eagle flew by as we ate our sandwiches, and the wasps mercifully left us alone. Sally checked off her bird list. I admired the pale gold tree, its leaves sparse now, so that the smallest branches cast a net against the water. Spiritual or not, we agreed that we both felt restored and refreshed.



A Garden is a Lovesome Thing

The apricot lilies are glorious, I say to myself, looking out at the garden. They light up my Scotch Presbyterian soul. A scruffy pot rescued from the neighbor's trash has grown into a clump of twenty-five blooms. They have apricot centers and a pale wine edging on the up-facing petals. They are a tribute to a good hole with plenty of compost and fertilize

Sitting on the back porch with my breakfast tea, I can feel that the June day is warming up. Every morning I sit here on the porch and survey the deep green of the lawn, the flower beds edging it in a half-moon curve, the tall oaks a mass of shimmering green in the background. My domain.

Two goldfinches undulate into the garden, the bright yellow male first, perching on a foxglove stem, the dull greenish female following. To the birds the garden is a well-stocked supermarket, with many brands of insects and seeds. The hummingbirds have a special order. I grow red flowers for them.

"Vera is coming over this morning to see the garden," I tell my husband when he comes out with his coffee. One of my oldest friends, Vera likes to say I taught her to garden, although she has boldly gone where I would not in the years since.

Her style is sort of overgrown jungle — her front yard is a tangle of flowers and shrubs, reaching for the sky, a chaos of color and fragrance.

Imaginative, offbeat, exuberant. It reflects her personality.

Thinking of her visit, I'm glad to see that my flower beds are looking fairly neat, few weeds visible. There are blooming patches of color here and there: golden day lilies in one corner, pink bell flower in another. But it lacks the Impressionist's all-over effect — mists of color blending seamlessly into one another, as I've seen in England.

"I've going to mulch the zinnias this morning," I tell my husband. "You did a good job of raising them. Look at all the colors — red, pink, magenta, gold, lavender, purple, orange. They'll be great in bouquets."

"I grow good plants for you," he says, pleased. Jack likes to raise plants from seed. But once they are in the ground—and out of his care in the basement—he is less interested in their welfare.

Going down the steps to the yard, I notice that the bleeding heart in the corner is dying back, its leaves curled and yellow. It's one of the first plants to bloom in early spring — little white hearts hanging in a row from arching stems of filmy leaves. I've treasured it ever since my friend Margaret brought me a little pot from her home in New England twenty years ago.

Time to mulch. Dragging the bag of pine needles, I tuck handfuls carefully around each zinnia. Grab and stoop, rise and bend, sweat



dripping onto the soil below. The ground is covered with tiny forget-me-not seedlings, offspring of the blue wave which surged around the tulips in the spring. These volunteers are the beginning of next year's show.

"Hello." Vera has come into the yard. "What a lovely vista, complete with working gardener! Those orange lilies are fantastic."

"They are, aren't they?" I reply, pleased. "And notice the purple blossoms of the butterfly bush hanging above them. A nice contrast — unplanned."

"Many of our best effects are," she says with a smile. "How did you get that blue clematis and red-leaved vine combination on the fence?"

"That's a grapevine I saw on my garden trip to England," I reply. My mind flips back to Erdigg House, an old estate in Wales where a high brick wall surrounded the herb garden. The grape, with delicate leaves a muted wine color, had been trained against the dark rosy brick to frame the entrance arch in the wall.

"I ordered it from that specialist nursery in Washington state," I told Vera. "Then the clematis decided to wind through it."

Vera pauses to survey the scene. "Your rose doesn't look too good. You should see my new pink one, Rosy Fingers of Dawn. It's grown six feet up the trellis over the front walk and you get a wonderful perfume as you walk through."

"I'll look next time I drive by," I say tactfully. The iron trellis over the front sidewalk is a subject of

debate among Vera's friends — it seems sort of stuck out in the middle of nowhere. But, lately she has developed a passion for roses, and she needed something for this one to climb on.

"I'm babying those cuttings of your yellow chrysanthemum," I say. "They're not big enough to set out yet."

"I'll wait. That blue Siberian iris you gave me was lovely," she says. "I could use another clump."

"OK." Vera and I are of the generation that believes in adding to our garden by swapping plants. We can't get over the way the younger gardeners in the neighborhood order expensive plants from catalogs.

"Coffee?" I ask.

"No, sorry, I've got a report to write." Vera straightens her sun hat and walks across the lawn.

"Thanks for coming," I say. "It's fun to have a real gardener to talk to,"

Relaxing on the porch, I smile at the difference in our gardening styles. Her garden is exuberant, imaginative, a creative tangle. Mine is conventional. I try for an orderly English perennial garden with well-defined edges, drifts of bloom, neat edges, a velvety lawn.

For both of us the garden is a central part of our lives. Broken fingernails, huge water bills, don't matter. Healthy plants die overnight; puny plants suddenly thrive. But there's always an intriguing new flower in the seed catalog, a friend who gives us something marvelous and guaranteed to multiply. Enough for a lifetime.



Backyard
Nature

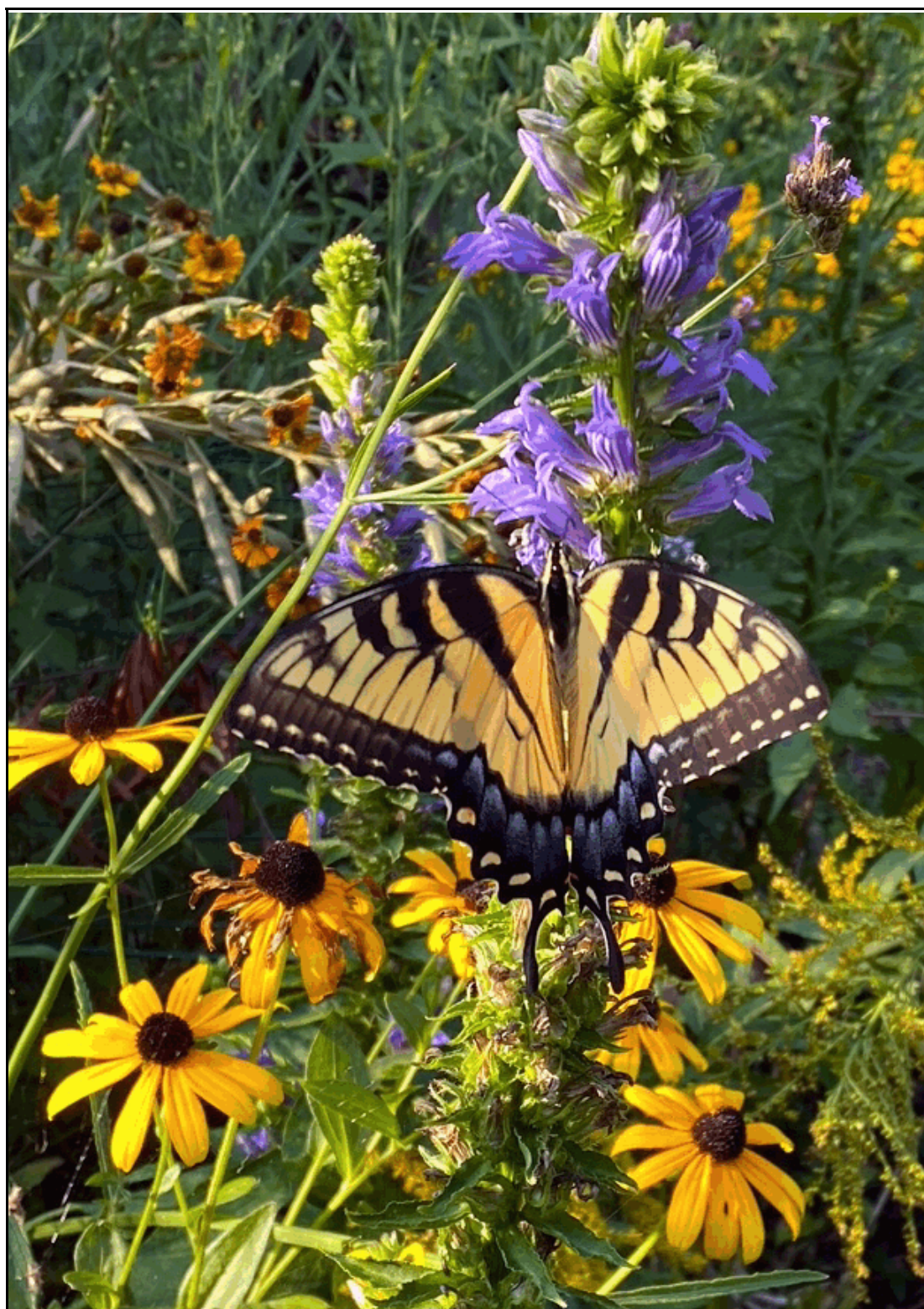


Photo by Sarah Conezio

The Tiger in Your Yard

A yellow butterfly with black hatch marks flutters into the backyard, circles the garden, and lands on the purple blossom of the butterfly bush. Several years ago I planted this bush just to attract this eastern tiger swallowtail. It will put a long straw-like tongue into the flower, sipping nectar, and sit a few minutes fluttering its wings to maintain balance. Sometimes one moves around the bush for half an hour, with occasional flights to look at other blooms.

You don't have to garden to see this butterfly — it's fairly common in our neighborhood in the summer, even on the flower beds along Connecticut Avenue. The black markings on the yellow are supposed to make you think of a tiger, which explains the name. Males are yellow; females may be yellow or black. All of them have the little "tail" coming out of each hind wing. They're pretty, but, more important, swallowtails are important pollinators for some plants. They pick up pollen on their bodies and legs and transfer it to the next flower, just like bees.

Although their main food is nectar, their main job is to mate. The males are on patrol. To attract a female, they emit a pheromone, a chemical that acts as a sexy butterfly perfume.

Occasionally I see two butterflies suddenly spiral

high up into the air together, then disappear and presumably mate. Once mated, the female gets down to business. She has to find the right food plant before she can lay eggs. Like all butterfly caterpillars, the caterpillars of a tiger swallowtail are fussy — they will eat the leaves of only a few kinds of plants. It's an interesting comment on evolution that caterpillars of each species of butterfly have their own food plants and will die if they cannot find enough of them. For example, if you see little holes on the leaves of your violets, you may have fritillary caterpillars — that's all they eat.

In this area yellow swallowtails are looking for a tulip tree, of which there are plenty here, or a wild black cherry tree. The female does not need a Field Guide — she uses sight and smell to find the proper tree — chemoreceptors in her antenna and on the bottom of her legs are her "nose." She lays a tiny egg on a leaf, then moves on.

The caterpillars are only 1/16 inch when they hatch a few days later, but they are big eaters — chomping tulip tree leaves steadily for about two weeks. As the picture (below, left) shows, they look like something out of a sci-fi movie. I think they are cute — although at one stage they are brown and

resemble a bird's dropping (below, right), in order to fool predators.

Growing fast, their outer skin tightens, and they have to molt out of it 5 times. When they are about two inches long, hormones make them stop eating and secrete a different tough outer skin. This is their chrysalis or "cocoon." They attach it to a twig or the bark of a tree with threads of silk. Now they are about to metamorphose into a butterfly. We've all heard about it in school, but when you stop to think, it is *amazing* what is happening inside that chrysalis. The caterpillar's DNA begins a process that makes the caterpillar body disappear and then gradually produces new cells that change and develop and become the wings and body of a butterfly.

After nine or ten days, the butterfly is fully formed inside the chrysalis. It breaks out, and the swallowtail emerges with wings folded. It will sit several hours pumping fluid into its wings until they are ready to fly. At this point it begins looking for nectar and the whole cycle starts over again – egg, caterpillar, chrysalis, adult.

In our area this butterfly will usually have two to three broods, and the last one will hibernate over the winter in its chrysalis. There are three other species of swallowtails that you may see in our neighborhood, all of them black, but they are not common. In my garden I can expect to see a total of maybe 18 different species of butterfly during the year, some more common in the spring, others in the summer. In the countryside there would be many more.

Swallowtails are not "endangered", but there are 20 other species of butterflies and moths now federally-listed as endangered. Two of our American

butterflies are already extinct. Development — roads, houses, malls — often destroys fields, swamps and other butterfly habitat, as does some farming and overgrazing. When a wildflower nectar source or a food plant disappears, so does the butterfly. We need conservation at every level.

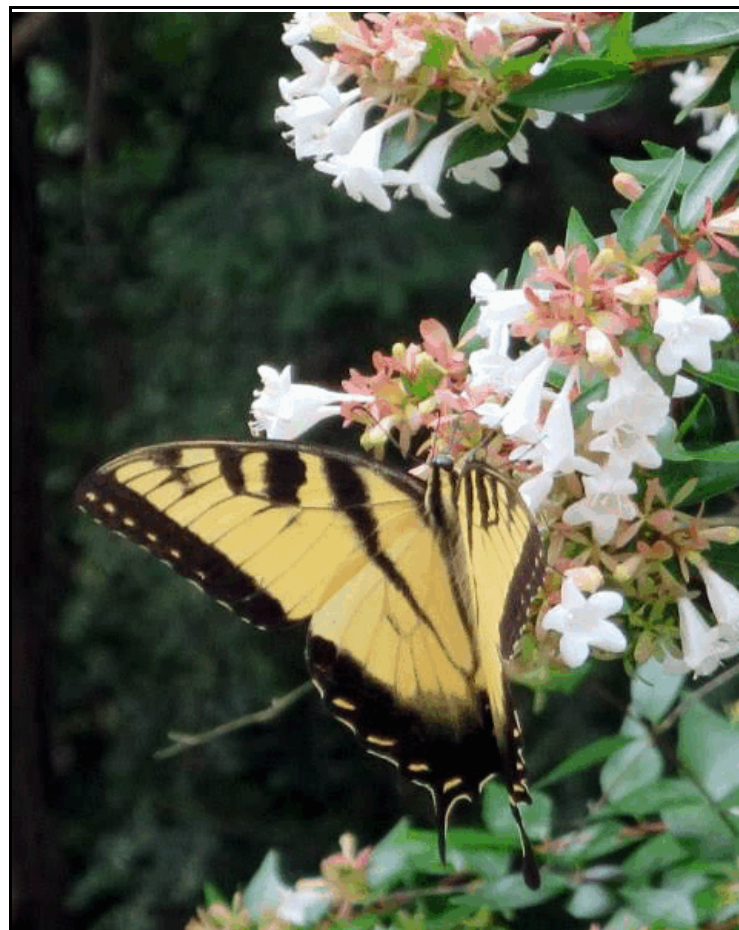


photo by Marlene Berlin

The Great Journey of the Monarchs

This morning there was an orange monarch butterfly flitting around my garden, sipping nectar from the flower. Who would guess that soon that fragile butterfly will be off on a long trip to Mexico soon?

It's an amazing saga – the butterflies make an 1800-mile trip south in the fall, then several generations make a slower return trip in the spring. Eastern Monarchs leave in late August through October to make the two-month journey to their wintering grounds, which are about 60 miles northwest of Mexico City. Groups of monarchs roosting have already been reported north of us, in New York and Minnesota.

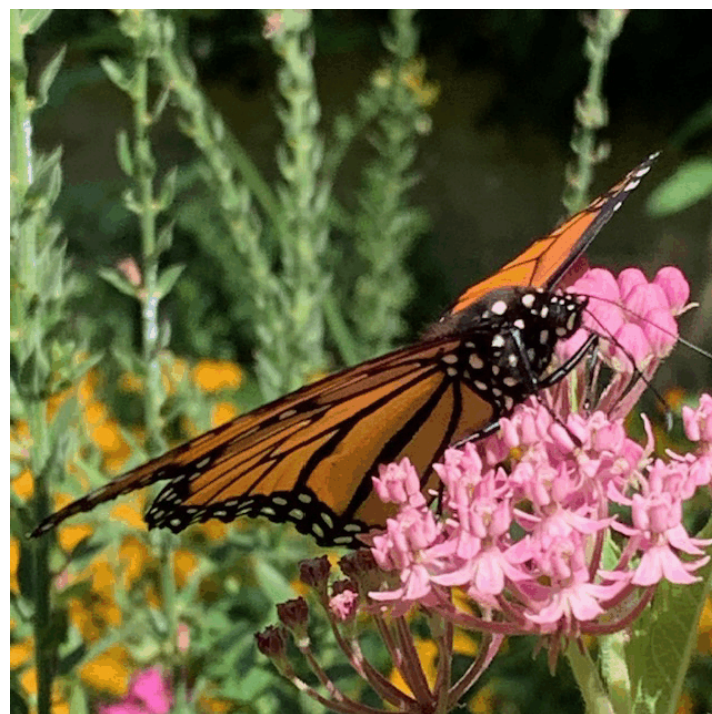
They fly during the day, then drop down at sunset to roost in a tree or bush. I have seen them in Cape May, New Jersey in late September, flying low along the beaches near the shore during the day, then covering a small bush on the dunes with fluttering orange as night falls.

Those Monarchs were taking the flyway along the Atlantic coast. Others fly south to Mexico down the Mississippi River valley or along the Rocky Mountains. West coast Monarchs use a Pacific Ocean flyway to winter in Pacific Grove or Santa Cruz, California.

The not-so-distant ancestors of the monarchs that fly up the east coast started their journey in Mexico. Here, the butterflies completely cover some trees in their winter site outside of Angangueo,

Michoacan, Mexico. It's estimated that in some years 60 million to a billion monarchs arrive in Mexico by late October. They go to a pine-oak forest in the mountains sixty miles northwest of Mexico City. Here they roost near the top of the mountains at 10,000 feet in tall fir trees. They need to keep cool so that their metabolism will slow down and save energy. The trees buffer them from snow and wind, although they fly out for water during brief sunny periods. There are about 14 roosts in the area, which draws tourists from all over the world.

In March those same butterflies will fly north, stopping in Florida, Texas or Arkansas. Some arrive



Monarch in Marjorie's garden (photo by Sarah Conezio)

here in D.C. There, the old generation will feed, lay eggs and die. Caterpillars from the new generation produce adults that fly several hundred miles further north, and repeat the process. By the time they reach us, in June, we are probably seeing the fourth generation. Some go as far as southern Canada.

When they get here, monarchs nectar on many flowers, but they will lay eggs only on milkweed plants, the only food the caterpillars will eat. From those plants the caterpillars absorb cardiac glycosides, which are unpalatable to birds. This chemical is passed on to the butterfly. They don't taste good!

The orange color of monarchs is a warning to birds, and once a bird eats one, it stays away from the others. Viceroy butterflies, which look much like monarchs, were long thought to be just a mimic,



Monarchs roosting (photo by Jean Beaufort).

but recent research shows they are also unpalatable.

The monarch caterpillar eats milkweed leaves steadily for about two weeks, then forms a lovely green chrysalis, where metamorphosis takes place. The adult butterfly emerges in ten days, dries its wings and begins life. Monarchs in our yards can live from 4 to 6 weeks in the summer, but the generation born in August may live 8 months, making the long journey south and resting over winter to start north again in the spring.

Scientists at Monarch Watch have set up a program of tagging the butterflies, in order to get better data on their journey and their lives. The program relies on citizen scientists as well as professionals and has been used by a number of school groups.

When the monarch is caught, a thin tag, 1/4-inch wide, is placed on the underside of the hindwing of the butterfly before it is released. The butterflies do not seem to notice the tag, and it has no harmful effect. The tagger fills in a data sheet, showing weather, and when and where the butterfly was tagged, and sends it to Monarch Watch.

If this tag is found when the butterfly dies, the finder can send its number to Monarch Watch, which then notes how long that butterfly had been flying, etc. Gradually a better picture of monarch migration routes and behavior is being gathered.

A few other butterflies in the world migrate short distances, but none makes the long, hard trip of the monarchs. So, imagine the great journey of the butterfly in your garden, which may later roost in Mexico.

Table Manners at the Bird Feeder

Seeds, suet, action! There's been a hungry clientele at my bird feeder, particularly since it got cold. During the winter, I can expect to see about 14 different species chowing down, and possibly a rare new one.

To a bird, a feeder is a restaurant with a menu and varied seating arrangements. If you watch closely, you will see different dining styles among our feathered clientele.

Goldfinches, house finches and cardinals fly in, sit on the feeder, and gorge. They are the seed eaters – the birds for whom seeds are a main staple all year long. They have a strong wide bill that can hold and crack a seed, let the husk fall, and retain the kernel so they can to swallow it. These are the sit-down diners, occupying the perches, methodically eating one seed after another, while others wait in a nearby tree.

The take-out crowd grabs a sunflower seed and flies off. Black-capped chickadees, tufted titmice, and white-breasted nuthatches have narrow pointed bills, designed for an insect diet in the warmer months. They can't manage this trick of taking the husk off with their beaks. They carry the sunflower seed to a nearby branch, put their foot on it, peck until the husk falls off, then eat the kernel.

Sometimes they hide the seed instead – tucking it into a crevice in the bark of a nearby tree and going back to the feeder for more. I have seen a white-breasted nuthatch fly back and forth to the feeder five times in rapid succession, hiding the seed each time in the bark of my neighbor's oak. The carry-

out diner.

Some birds don't come to the table at all – they are basically ground feeders. They rely on scraps that fall to the floor. Mourning doves like the ground, as do many sparrows. In addition to the usual English sparrows, I'm seeing two other kinds of sparrow in my yard right now: One song sparrow that nested here in the summer and decided to stay, and a group of white-throated sparrows, who arrived in October for the winter. (They are the ones that sing a high plaintive song, "Pea-bo-dy, Pea-bo-dy" from time to time.)

Many of the ground birds eat seeds all year long,



and they enjoy small seeds like millet and cracked corn, which come in most mixed bags of feed, so I scatter some on the grass.

How do you run a bird restaurant? I have a tube feeder, which I fill with black sunflower seeds, and occasionally peanuts. I am interested in attracting finches, and they prefer sunflower or sunflower hearts. I don't like grackles and starlings, and this kind of tube has short perches that make it hard for them to light. Unfortunately, bluejays also find it uncomfortable, although they manage to snatch a seed or two before dropping to the ground.

Types of birdfeeders are legion. Many are designed to keep squirrels from eating you out of house and home. A baffle keeps the squirrels off my tube feeder, but, of course, nothing keeps them from pigging out on the ground. And you may find that flying squirrels are visiting at night.

Woodpeckers prefer fat; they ignore the seeds. When the suet feeder is up, I will have one or two downy woodpeckers there every day, and, from time to time, a look-alike species, the hairy woodpecker. The biggest member of the family is a red-bellied sapsucker, which is not red-bellied at all but has a red patch on the back of its head. All these woodpeckers have big strong bills, used to digging insects out of tree bark, and their main diet most of the year is insects.

I beg the butcher for beef fat, but suet cakes do just as well. The fat also attracts Carolina wrens, who have to have fat and food from us if they are to survive a true cold spell. (All these birds apparently never got the message about the risk of dietary fats.)

To a hawk, however, birds at a feeder are the

main course. I am told that a Cooper's Hawk will eat a mourning dove a day if they can get it, and my neighbor had a Cooper's visiting pretty regularly last year. It's not always an easy hunt though — many birds mean many eyes to keep watch. If all suddenly goes quiet in your yard, and the birds disappear into the bushes, there's probably a hawk nearby. Often the bluejays will scream an alarm. The hawk may leave, but it will take 15 minutes or so before the birds re-appear.

What's happening at your feeder? Have you seen a pileated woodpecker, perhaps? A towhee? Squirrels, anyone?



Backyard Symphony

It's 8 a.m., and I'm sitting on the back porch, looking out at the garden. No birds, no bees yet. It's August and nature is slowing down.

Suddenly a persistent buzz comes from the oak trees. In August and September, the sound filling the air is not bird song. This is when cicadas, katydids, crickets and grasshoppers fill our backyards with sound.

I listen, sipping my coffee. The buzz comes in waves, swelling louder, tapering off, pausing abruptly. One cicada species pauses after five seconds and another species keeps going for 15 seconds. After a couple of minutes, the sound shuts down, sometimes for hours.

The cicadas sing more when it is hot and muggy. As the temperature rises, the song speeds up with this kind of insects. An expert who studied the snowy tree cricket found that if you counted the number of chirps in 13 seconds and added 40, you would have a good approximation of the temperature!

At night, it's a chorus. After dark, the insect chorus really gets deafening — katydids, cicadas, tree crickets, maybe field crickets, grasshoppers. It's hard to figure out what kind of insect you are hearing. See SongsofInsects.com for great audio and lots of info (used for this piece).

Cicada songs are often described as a “pulsating buzz” or a “drone.” They and the katydids have a

similar mechanism for making sound. They rub their wings against a special organ on their abdomen. They are busy day and night.

After dark, I find that the katydids song often dominates the evening. It is a “series of tic, tic, tic accompanied with buzzes... somewhat like a shaker full of rice or a ratcheting sprinkler,” according to SongsofInsects.com.

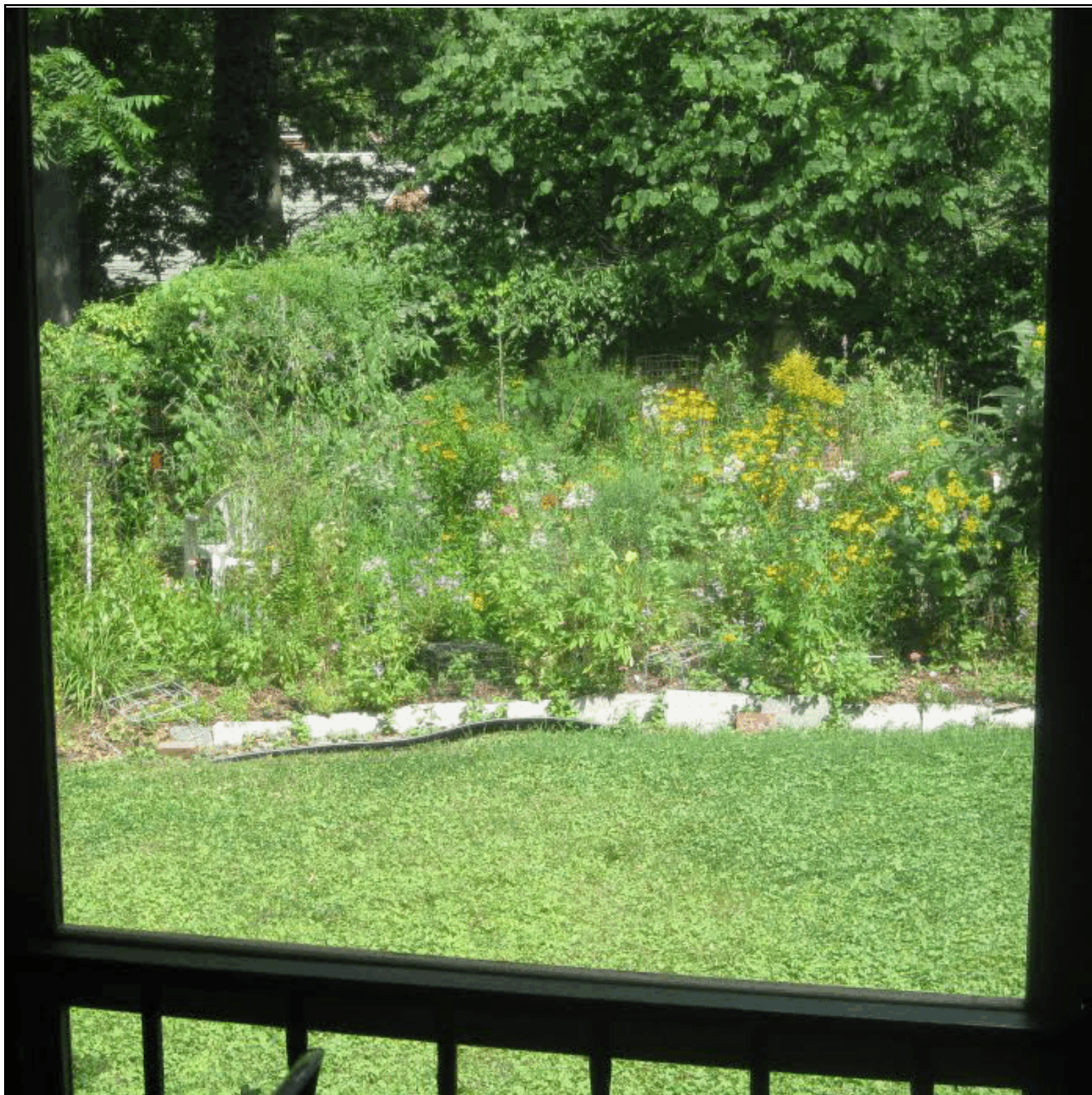
You'll hear crickets, too. We recognize them because of the crickets that come into our basements in the fall. There are 115 species of crickets in North America, and each species has its own particular song, but all crickets have a melodic quality.

As of mid-August, I am hearing a loud, continuous musical trill in the backyard at night – probably a group of tree crickets. There may be field crickets and ground crickets that I can't distinguish.

Grasshoppers are the fourth part of the chorus. There are many more grasshoppers out there than we usually see because they are hiding in the meadows. Grasshoppers' legs go up and down and scrape against the edge of the wings, making a high-pitched trill or sometimes a snapping sound.

Listening for these sounds brings surprises. Go out in the yard at night and tune in. You will be amazed at the variety of pitch, speed and beat.

Why are they singing? The males are trying to attract a mate. It's serious sex — they are in a hurry



to reproduce before cold weather comes, when most die. Cicadas for example, often amplify their sound by gathering in groups to attract females. If the male succeeds, he gives the female a sperm packet, and she will lay 200 to 400 eggs in tiny slits in the bark or stems of trees.

The “nymph,” which hatches in about six weeks, drops to the ground and buries itself. It eats juices from roots for as long as four years, then emerges, crawls up a tree trunk, and a winged adult emerges.

Right now we are hearing annual cicadas. These are not the cicadas that emerge in astounding

numbers every 17 years. Those 17-year cicadas are often mistakenly called “locusts,” and people identify them with the scourges of locusts in the Bible. Not so. Those Biblical “locusts” are grasshoppers, eating everything in their path. They are still a problem in the Middle East, and this year, in the American West.

Katydid and crickets have a special mating trick. During mating the male transfers a bubble-like protein pack to the female, which she will eat and will help her develop her eggs.

Of course, these are only the ones we hear. Many more insects are hiding — unheard in the foliage.



The insect choristers. Below left: dog-day cicada. Above left: snowy tree cricket. Above right: true katydid. Below right: marsh meadow grasshopper. (photos courtesy of SongsOfInsect.com)



Apple Trees & Our Tipsy Past

Did you know there is an heirloom orchard in Forest Hills? It's next to Peirce Mill, our restored grist mill on Rock Creek at Beach Drive and Tilden Streets. This orchard is planted with heirloom apples and pears, old varieties that would have been grown in the 19th century when the mill complex was a busy operation.

These apples are similar to the heirloom tomatoes familiar from farmers markets. They provide a lot of different flavors, but are too misshapen or blotchy for today's consumer. In the last 50 years, scientists have focused on preserving these old apple varieties because in the future they might need the old genes to breed new apples adapted to climate change, a sudden apple disease, or a new commercial need. (A Golden Delicious apple has 57,000 genes; humans have 30,000.)

Hundreds of old heirloom apple varieties are being grown by the U.S. Department of Agriculture in upstate New York—see photo. These apple trees are part of a worldwide network of seed banks and farms that preserve the genes of plants all over the globe.

As part of a historical renovation, some of these varieties now grow here at Peirce Mill. Why have an orchard at a mill? Part of the Peirce family business was making and selling cider, hard cider, and apple brandy. Their apple orchard probably stretched along the west bank of Rock Creek. The distillery was in a stone building still standing near the mill at Tilden and Shoemaker streets.

In the 1800s, when the mill was a commercial business, and for two centuries before that, hard cider was the major alcoholic beverage in the U.S. It was cheap, easy to make at home, and safer than water in some places. Many apple trees were grown solely for their cider apples. At that time, sugar was hard to get and expensive, so apples were also prized for the sweetness they brought, eaten fresh or cooked. (My grandmother had a wormy apple tree in her back yard, so I grew up with homemade applesauce, apple butter, conserve, apple pie, baked apples, etc.)

In the past, farmers and homeowners planted a wide variety of apples, depending on the use they planned. Some kinds were better for eating, others for cooking. Some stored well over winter, some made great cider. Some ripened in August and others in October. Experts have estimated that there were 14,000 varieties of apples grown in the 19th century in the United States. Many are now extinct.

The trees in the mill's new orchard are small, planted only five years ago. When they mature, the orchard will have 18 old-time apple varieties and six kinds of old pears. For example, the Harrison apple was highly prized for making a rich, sweet cider. The apples are yellow, oddly shaped and often dotted with black spots, but they make great cider.

Another of the trees will produce Calville Blanc d'Hiver, a French apple still grown in France to make calvados brandy. It's a good eating apple, too. Claude

Monet featured it in his painting, “Still Life with Apples and Grapes.”

The apple is not native to the Americas. The settlers who founded Jamestown in 1607 and the Pilgrims in Massachusetts in 1620 had trees shipped across the Atlantic shortly after they arrived. By the time of the American Revolution, most East Coast landowners had orchards. George Washington’s orchard and Thomas Jefferson’s orchard have now been restored and are open to visitors.

Seeds from the imported trees produced many new American apple varieties, valuable because they often adapted well to local climates and soils. Outstanding apple varieties would spread throughout the original colonies, and pioneers took them over the Appalachians.

One tree in the Peirce Mill orchard is a reminder of Thomas Jefferson. Jefferson liked to brag about his cider, which “tasted like champagne.” To get this taste, he blended two apple varieties. For sweetness he used the Roxbury Russet from Massachusetts. For balance and acid tang he used Virginia’s Hewe’s Crabapple.

The trees in the orchard are cloned – that is, the apple variety is grafted onto a rootstock that does well in our area. Apple trees do not reproduce true from seed. If you want to grow a good variety you have to graft a twig from the original onto a hearty rootstock. Several heirloom varieties known to have been grown by the Peirces have been grafted. That includes the Roxbury Russet, discovered in the Massachusetts Bay Colony in 1650 on a tree that was growing from seed. It had several virtues. It kept well in the winter, important in a time when root cellars were the only

refrigeration. Its other virtue was an unusually high sugar content – one apple had almost 13% sugar that fermented to 6% alcohol.

The Peirce family had a nursery near the mill. They sold a variety of fruit and landscaping trees and their 1824 catalogue shows 50 varieties of apples, with names like Clear Drinking, Lady Finger, Maiden’s Blush. (See 1899 drawing of the Harrison apple, courtesy of the USDA Pomological Watercolor Collection, Beltsville, MD). They also sold pear, cherry, peach, plum and other fruit trees. Small grafted trees cost 20 cents.

Today’s demonstration orchard at Peirce Mill was planted five years ago on poor soil that had been dumped on the spot during past construction, according to Tim Makepeace, the volunteer in charge. The trees were not thriving. Makepeace organized a number of work-days to enhance the soil, space the trees correctly, and install a deer fence. To build soil structure and fertility, he is planting cover crops like native clovers, legumes, and buckwheat – changing them spring and fall.

In August, volunteers clear out the summer ground cover and plant a new crop for fall season. They dig up the soil and turn it over to prepare it for sowing seeds of the fall crop. Seeds in the cover crop have been carefully selected to improve the soil. They fix nitrogen in the soil, improve the clay structure, or have flowers that attract bees and pollinating insects. The seeds will sprout, grow through the winter and be cut down in the spring. The dead stalks provide mulch and enrich the soil as they decompose – creating what is known in the gardening world as “green manure.”

Snug as a Bug in an Insect Hotel

What is that pile of junk and brush in my garden?

It's a winter hotel – a place for insects and small critters like toads and garden snakes to find shelter. They need a place to keep out the winter cold and protection against predators.

Many butterflies, bees, beetles, ladybugs and other insects want a home for the winter. For example, there are three species of butterflies that overwinter as adults in our area, and they have to find a place to hibernate. This question mark butterfly will emerge in the spring to lay eggs for the next generation.

When fall arrives in Forest Hills, we usually rake up the leaves and cut down the garden plants. The ecologists are urging us to be more messy. Insects, toads, snakes, field mice and other small animals welcome a wintering place. Then they will reproduce and carry on the species in the spring.

Aren't insects pests? Some are, but most are beneficial. Every insect is an essential part of the ecology, close to the base of the food chain. They chew up plants, live and dead, and make them into compost. At least seven different kinds of insects pollinate our crops and gardens. And, they are a major food source for many creatures higher up on the food chain – a main meal for birds, snakes, lizards, bats, dragonflies, ants, and other insects. Coyotes and foxes love grasshoppers.

To start the hotel, I saved a pile of the plants we had ripped up when we were clearing the garden. The leaves and stems of these dead plants may contain beneficial insect and spider eggs or cocoons waiting for the spring.

A neighbor gave me six bricks to use as a partial base. I left spaces between them for caterpillars, beetles or whatever to crawl into. Some beetles live over the winter – others overwinter as eggs.

I also added leaves – insects like bumblebees are very partial to leaf litter. A bumblebee colony dies in the fall, but one mated queen survives to live over the winter and carry on the species. Next spring she will emerge and find a spot to lay eggs for a new colony. She likes to burrow into leaf litter or find a tiny crevice.

I have an American toad in the yard, and I wanted to make sure it had a place to hibernate. Animals like toads, frogs, lizards, field mice and garden snakes need space, so I placed several firewood logs from a neighbor's woodpile. Some other insects will drill holes in these logs for their home.

Ladybugs eat thousands of aphids in your garden in the summer. For winter they like a container with twigs like rosebush cuttings. Other insects look for a hollow stem, so we cut up and bundled a stalk of the bamboo which grows across the street.

On top, to keep out rain, we put a broken terra cotta saucer which I found in someone's trash, with



Author's insect hotel in progress (below) and completed, with terra cotta roof and holly-leaf cornice (above).

holly clippings for a Christmas touch. You can see that the hotel will be comfy. It is sited next to a sunny wall where it should be warmer on good days.

Now, we will wait to see what moves in.

Not everyone can afford luxury accommodations. So what about budget hotels? Making a hotel is a bit of work. A compost pile is an easy substitute, sort of an insect Motel 6. It's attractive to all sorts of animal life, particularly if it has both green plant stuff and dead leaves and brush. Green kitchen waste is okay.

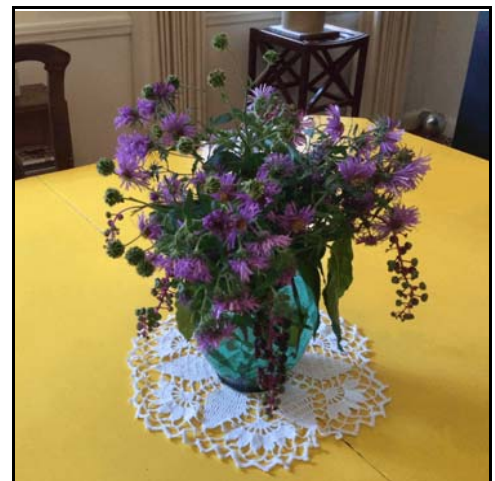
There are millipedes, slugs, snails and earthworms in your compost pile already. Some of the insects and the small animals already mentioned in

this article might prefer this compost heap to the hotel. That decaying plant stuff and leaf litter is moist, and decay provides warmth in the center.

For a glimpse of the "Insect Waldorf Astoria," consider the insect hotel in a park in Grinstead, England. The British build elaborate winter hotels with a wide variety of pricey suites. The slot at the bottom of this could accommodate the little British hedgehog and also provides an entry for snakes and mice.

We don't need to get that fancy. Just leave some of the leaves on your beds, make a pile of brush if you have it, and leave the garden plants to be cut back next spring. The local insects will thank you.





Above: goldenrod and lobelia. Upper right: foxtail. Middle right: boneset. Lower right: fall aster.

Fall Bouquets

When I vacationed in England, I made it a point to visit small towns and seek out the small ancient churches. If I was lucky, it might be the day that the Women's Committee was arranging flowers for the altar. These arrangements were usually large, standing on pedestals. The thrifty committee did not use florist flowers — they used local greenery plus a few garden flowers from their homes.

It was fun to see their creativity. They might be using weeds, grasses, ferns, leaf twigs, fall berries, bittersweet, cattails, seed pods, or colorful fall leaves — whatever was available — weaving them together for an altar tribute. They are not just limited to quaint locations. Such bouquets adorn the lobby of prestigious museums — the Sackler Gallery in D.C., or the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York.

On my October walks in the nearby park, I have noticed a lot of weedy material just right for such bouquets, and evoking memories of my trips to England. Inspired, I returned home to try my hand using materials from my own garden.

One used foxtail grass. It sits on my dining room table. I enjoy the grace of its arching stems and the green spear-like leaves setting them off.

Another used two native plants, goldenrod and blue lobelia. In October, goldenrod is a glory along the

roads in Maryland farm country. The blue lobelia likes some shade — I find it on the edges of the nearby woods.

A third effort combined upland boneset and miscellaneous seed pods, yielding a somewhat rangy arrangement. Boneset is a relative of Joe Pye weed, and it is much beloved by bees. It grows everywhere along roads in the nearby park.

A fourth used an unidentified common grass, with spectacular spiky ochre stalks.

And a final one was an homage to purple! When my husband and I drove to Cape Cod each year in the fall, the meadows and fields along the way were full of native New England asters. I grow them in my garden and paired them with the berries of pokeweed and odd seedpods.

So, challenge your artistic side and try a natural bouquet? There is lots of material out there — red berries on the dogwoods and the hollies, tiny cones on the hemlocks, seed pods in your garden, grasses on the edge of alleys, leaves turning. Even if making a bouquet does not interest you, you can still enjoy the fall beauty of the ordinary plants and seeds around us.

[Photos and arrangements are by the author and Georgia Telmo.]



Autobiographical Episodes



My Father

Thinking about my father makes me sad. I realize how much he loved me and my sisters – and how determined he was to take care of us. But throughout my childhood – and until he died when I was almost 40 – I was set against him. I felt he treated my mother badly – and I was afraid of his sudden eruptions of bad temper, although he hit out with words, not fists.

It's strange now to see that I have become a lot like him. The good and the bad.

Lots of energy. My father threw himself into whatever he was doing, first his business, then his piano lessons, his sailboats, his photography. He was determined to learn, to conquer. Looking back, I don't think his failures or half- successes discouraged him – he did not need to be perfect – he was interested in trying something new.

He needed that energy and determination to keep his business alive. The Rotor Tool Company, was a constant presence in our lives – we heard about it at the dinner table, we overheard him talking to mother about it, we had all the salesmen to dinner one by one. We knew the names of his competitors, Ingersoll Rand and Jones Tool and Die, and felt his worry about them. If we were out driving and we passed one of their factories, he would smile and say “Spit out the window.”

He had become head of this little company in 1927, just two years before the stock market crash of 1929. He must have been terrified that it would go

under. In the beginning he was President and head salesman, and he had to travel around the country to see customers and persuade them to buy industrial tools — jackhammers, riveters, sanders, all powered by compressed air. In a time when companies were having a hard time staying afloat, it must have been difficult to get them to invest money in new tools, but that is what Rotor Tool Company did in the 1930s. He told me once that a salesman had to be able to see how to adapt the tools to the customer's problems, and that was one of Rotor's strengths. He also told me that there was more profit in the replacement parts than in the original tools (a useful insight — think of Hewlett Packard printers and the cost of ink!).

It must have been hard. Many years later I learned that he had to put a second mortgage on our house to raise needed funds. He never told my mother in order not to worry her.

In the late 1930s, when unions were organizing many factories, Rotor Tool company set up a “nice little company union.” Daddy was angry when, a few years later, the Mine, Mill and Smelter Workers came in and persuaded the workers to join a real union — he always talked about it as if they “took over” the company union with a gun.

He seems to have had the foresight to see that rotor tools could be sold in Europe. Daddy went to Europe at some point in the 30's and later Rotor had a foreign representative, known as Mr Marbaix, who

I think was Belgian. Occasionally Mr Marbaix would come to Cleveland and we would have him to dinner — a big occasion. He sent mother lovely presents — I remember a Belgian lace tablecloth set.

I don't know whether Mr. Marbaix was responsible but some time around 1938, Rotor got a big contract to supply all the tools for a new factory in the Urals in Russia. The Company made a lot of money from this contract, and I think Daddy's worries eased some. When war orders began to come through, even before 1941, business picked up substantially.

While I was growing up, he was often irritable, and now I can understand why. He would get mad when we hadn't hung up our coats properly and they

fell on the floor of the closet. He would chastise us for leaving the lights on — the electric bill — or using too much toilet paper. "Money doesn't grow on trees," we would hear. My mother wasn't like that — she would ask us mildly to "Turn the light off, honey." And she reacted badly to his temper — her father had never acted like that. I got the feeling that she was afraid of him — although now I can speculate that it was just the woman's role of an accepting "wife" in those days.

Around 1934 or so the family bought a new baby grand piano, in order to give my sisters and I a good instrument to learn. After a few months, my father decided to take up the piano. He had a piano teacher known as Gertie, an attractive blonde in her forties. There were many humorous remarks about Gertie and my father — it was assumed that an unmarried woman and a man doing something together would lead to trouble. My father liked the idea of being kidded as a gay blade, but he would have been horrified if anyone truly thought he was likely to stray.

I don't recall my father ever practicing any scales —he preferred popular songs and Presbyterian hymns. "Rock of Ages" was a favorite. But after a year or so, he became restless. He and Gertie collaborated on a book called "The Piano Made Easy." He must have been impatient with the slow progress of ordinary piano teaching, and felt he could devise something better.

His interest in the piano disappeared at some point, and my father took up sailing. He didn't know much about it, but he purchased a small 18 foot sailboat, and set aside Sundays to learn. Thus began the years when Daddy left every Sunday for Mentor Yacht Club, his nose white with a heavy smear of zinc



oxide to ward off sunburn, He would return late in the afternoon, carrying wet sails that we spread out to dry on the backyard grass at Exeter Road.

After a year or so, he decided to have a bigger boat and to have it built at the Fairport Shipyard. We used to drive out on Sundays to watch its progress.

Lady Luck was a sloop, with a beautiful dark wood hull. She was about 28 feet long with a small cabin, very graceful. It was magical to go into the dark hanger in Fairport and look up at her hull as, week by week, the builders shaped it, then added the deck and the cabin.

Daddy began racing in earnest when he got Lady Luck. Every Sunday he and a crew of two or three would race the boat on the triangular course outside of Mentor. Daddy never won — it seemed as if his smarts in other fields did not translate to sailing, but he kept at it for years. Later, he bought Fine Feather, a bigger boat with a roomy cabin, but the family never felt the same about it.

When Daddy took up photography he did it with his usual all out enthusiasm. He had always taken pictures of the family—we have marvelous scrap-books. But when we moved into the new house on Lyman Circle in 1941, he set up a darkroom in the basement so he could develop his own pictures. It is from this period that we have so many big photos of the new house, the three of us girls, the Bailey relatives, etc. He experimented, too: dropping marbles into milk so he could catch the splash, and practicing similar tricky shots.

I went away to college in 1939, and although I was home for a year after graduation, it was wartime and I have few memories from that time. I was anxious to

leave — in those days young college graduates left home and went to New York City to seek their fortune. In the fall of 1944 I left Cleveland for good. It pained my father greatly when I went to work for the union in 1949. He never understood it.

Nowadays I am sad when I think of him. I regret that I never appreciated him while he was alive and I never thanked him for his care.

With hindsight I feel that he loved all of us very much — and his bad humor was a result of the stress of the Depression. I think, too, that he grew up in a difficult household with his mother and two brothers (his father died when he was 7), and he did not know how to relate to daughters. My mother grew up in a household with a lot of laughter and a big extended family, and I felt much easier and closer to her.

But I have inherited his energy and his drive, as well as his tendency to get involved in a range of enthusiasms. And I know now how lucky I was to have the safe and carefree childhood they provided.



Memories of Exeter Road*

I'm frustrated when I think of my childhood because I can't remember much. I would like to recall how I felt, what I did, and what my parents lived through. I was seven years old when the great Depression began in 1929, but I know most of the main events of the 1930s only through my history courses. When I think back, I find all that comes to mind is a series of fragmentary snapshots, many of them in the house on Exeter Road where I grew up.

Shortly after I was born, my parents bought a house in Cleveland Heights, a suburb just outside the city proper. It was a square grey-shingled house with a garage and a yard, on a street of similar brick, frame and shingled homes. The families on our street were middle class — not rich, but comfortable by the standards of the 1920s and 1930s. The fathers went to work each morning downtown — some owned a car, some took the streetcar. The mothers stayed home and took care of the children.

The house was fairly good size by the standards of those days, with four bedrooms and a bath upstairs, a good-sized dining room, living room and kitchen on the first floor. The attic had a room and bath where a maid lived from time to time. The basement, with a coal furnace, held the washing

machine, mangle and tubs, and a toilet for the cleaning/washing woman.

The dining room, just off the entrance hall, was the hub. In the center was a mahogany table, part of my parents wedding set, and under the side window sat a matching mahogany buffet, with mother's silver tea set and tray on top. A victrola stood in one corner. In the other, a spindly legged telephone table held a black phone and a bulky phone book.

Every night at 6:00, after Daddy came home from work, we ate dinner at the dining room table, set with tablecloth and silverware and a plate of salad. Mother brought the food from the kitchen — a platter of meat, serving dishes with potatoes and vegetable, and put them in front of Daddy. She sat down, Daddy served. It would be pork chops, lamb chops, ham, meat loaf; on Sundays, a roast beef, leg of lamb, or chicken.

In our family, dessert was the high point of the meal. We might have snow pudding, fruited jello, baked apples, canned peaches, chocolate pudding, tapioca pudding, apple crisp, floating island, cookies or — best — chocolate cake with seven-minute icing.

After dinner, my sister and I cleared the table, and helped mother with the dishes. My sister Nancy was only two years younger than me and we squabbled over this and everything else. My youngest sister, Joy, who was seven years younger than I, never had

[Editor's Note: This essay is a collage of several fragments, written at various times.]



to do anything in my memory. When the dishes were finished and put away, Nan and I could go outside and play, if it was still light.

I see now how much of her time my mother must have spent shopping and cooking. An icebox sat in a

little closet off the kitchen and the iceman came several times a week, but there were no frozen foods, no prepared orange juice, no ice cream. I can remember going with her to the butcher, then to the grocery store and the baker. She was fortunate to have a car for these shopping trips. When she learned to drive, Daddy bought her a Ford, while he drove the bigger Buick.

Once a week my Grandmother, Daddy's mother, came to dinner, driving up in her electric car (in the early days) and, later, in her Ford Model A. Grandma Bailey had been a widow for many years — her husband died when my father was seven, leaving her with a small inheritance and three boys to raise. My sisters and I did not know anything about her struggle — what we saw was a short plump woman who talked incessantly.

We dreaded dinner, because we had to sit quietly, long finished with our meal, waiting for dessert, while she went on and on. We were trapped until she ate everything on her plate. As I got older I thought of asking a question that would interrupt the flow, and encourage her to take a bite, but I didn't dare.

More exciting were the dinners when Daddy had invited one of his company's salesmen to dinner. There were six salesmen, men in their thirties or forties, each with a district, who visited factories and sold the rotor tools that Daddy supervised making in the plant downtown. A new one was always asked to dinner, presumably to get acquainted with the family. For these dinners there would always be a roast, carved by Daddy, and a special dessert, like a pie. My sisters and I wore clean dresses and sat quietly, listening.

By far the most exciting visitor was Daddy's visiting salesman from Belgium, Mr. Marbaix. Some time in the early 1930s, Daddy hired him as Rotor Tools' European representative, and he came across the ocean several times. Poised and polite, bearing expensive presents for mother, his foreign accent was fascinating — we didn't know anyone like that. In 1937 he sold tools to the Russians to equip an entire factory in the Urals, an order that made Daddy immensely proud.

After these dinners, Daddy would take visitors to the living room, where they would smoke cigars and talk, while we vanished into the kitchen.

The dining room was used for more than meals. We could wind up the victrola and dance around the table. And it was the place used for doctor's visits. The doctor came when we were sick — and also to give us vaccinations. He parked in front of the house and I would watch fearfully as he came up the walk with a little black bag. I hated being sick — and I don't know what the shots were for, since I got measles, chickenpox and whooping cough at various times. Mother worried a lot about scarlet fever and infantile paralysis, but there were no shots for those.

The dining room might be a bit messy, but the living room was neat. There was a fireplace and mantel on one side, where we left a snack for Santa in the early years. Over the couch was a gold-framed print of three spindly trees, a well-known painting titled "Harp of the Winds." Along the back wall sat the piano; in the front window, a magazine table and two Windsor chairs. Next to the fireplace sat mother's small desk, cherished from her girlhood, where she often sat to write notes or letters.

Often, before dinner, we sat on the floor in the living room and listened to the Story Lady on the radio. I can still sing the commercial, "When It's Ralston Time in Texas." Radio was not a big item in our lives — we didn't listen after dinner, and I can't recall hearing the news. Ours was not a political family — Daddy ranted about Roosevelt and the unions, but I came out of the 1930s knowing nothing about the problems or programs of the Depression. I could feel that the Depression frightened the adults, because Daddy was often anxious and would tell us to "turn off the lights!" or "don't use so much toilet paper!" in an angry tone. It was much later that I came to see how much stress he was under trying to keep his business afloat.

We ate our breakfast in the kitchen, a room big enough for a four-legged stove, counters and sink, and a green-painted kitchen table under the back window. After breakfast, my sister and I walked the five blocks to elementary school. We came home for lunch — peanut butter sandwiches, or tuna salad, creamed eggs or maybe leftovers, with a glass of milk, plus jello, junket or canned fruit. We had a well-balanced diet, Mother saw to that.



We had two cars — Daddy always had the bigger, fancier one. A Cadillac? An Oldsmobile? In those days, everyone washed their cars themselves, and most cars in our neighborhood were expected to be clean at all times. Daddy washed the cars himself. He would back the car out of the garage into the driveway, alongside the barberry hedge. Attach the hose, sprinkle the car. A bucket of soap and water stood by for a wash, then rinse with the hose and dry



with a chamois cloth. This was no slapdash effort — when we helped we had to do it right. He wanted no scratches on that car.

One family activity was cooking breakfast in one of the local forest parks that ringed Cleveland. I loved those outings to Forest Glen or Strawberry Lane or South Chagrin Park. Mother would pack the provisions, and when we got to the Park, Daddy would build a fire in the grate and cook bacon and eggs, while mother set the table. After breakfast we would take a hike. In Forest Glen the path led through the woods to a log cabin nature center with squirrels, raccoons, etc. Going through the woods, mother would stop to show us wild flowers, or call our attention to a bird. Those walks led me to the interest in the natural world that I have enjoyed all my life.

At South Chagrin, there was a little creek down the hill from our picnic table. Nan and I loved to build a bridge across it. This required picking up flat rocks, placing them in the water so they wouldn't rock when you stepped on them. Mother and Daddy sat at the

picnic table, read , watched. When I recall this, I feel a vague joy — what fun that was for the two little girls.

When I was little Daddy used to take us to the zoo. I think this was to give mother a chance for a rest. Then later, on Sunday mornings, he used to take us to the little lake by the Cleveland Museum of Art, where we fed the swans. Another treat was the times we would walk the four blocks up the Blvd. to McFetridge's Drug Store. Aim: a chocolate soda. Or, in this same 5-store shopping strip, we would get a rainbow ice cream cone, made up of the leftover ice cream from the bottom of the big cans: a multicolored assortment.



We lived on Exeter Road during my school years. I attended Fairfax, Roxboro and Heights High — all public schools. We walked to elementary school — back and forth again for lunch — then in junior high, I took the street car to Roxboro. For Heights High, I either rode the bus or walked. School was very important in our family. We were made to feel proud of our good grades. Mother took a close interest in our homework, helping if needed. In high school I can remember her helping with my Latin (she had taught Latin). I had a terrible time writing themes and she always helped me, to such an extent that when I got to college I really had to learn a lot quickly. Mother was the one who went to PTA meetings, of course. And took us to the library



The backyard was a fascinating place. I can still tell you the location of each pear, peach and cherry tree. And I can even tell you that the peach tree leaked gummy sap from its black bark and that the peaches

were usually part rotten. Besides the trees, there was a sandbox next to the garage, bordered by pink and yellow hollyhocks that came up every year. To one side of the garage I had a small garden, about 5-foot by 3-foot, where I planted false dragonhead and bachelor buttons and other hardy flowers.

The yard had other fascinations, however. Every January on a blue sunny day, a red cardinal would sit on the top of the telephone pole along the back, and sing, "Cheer, cheer." Mother would be overjoyed — "First sign of spring," she would say. Later that spring the song sparrow would sing in the front of the house — a pair regularly built a nest low in the barberry bushes where we could see the eggs. Very young I remember Mother showing us a robin's nest in the maple outside our bedroom window. Blue eggs, mother robin sitting quietly. My mother made those birds magic for us by her own enthusiasm.

Our neighbors next door had real gardens, however. The Formaneks, a family where the brothers and sisters still lived with their mother, had a big garden. Joe was the vegetable gardener, with neat rows of onions, beans, corn. I used to tag along and watch him and he always seemed glad to have me. His sister Mabel—fat but jolly—grew the flowers near the house, under an apple tree. I remember the Oriental poppies in the spring.

On the other side, bordered by a row of our redcurrant bushes, was Mr. Crawford's garden. It was also neat, divided down the middle by a path. He, too, grew all sorts of vegetables: lettuce, carrots, corn.

In back of us was Holly's garden. The path from our yard led across a foot deep ditch and straight

down a grassy path toward her back door. Vegetables on the right, flowers on the left. She was the only one who had blackcurrant bushes.

All these gardens were worked by the owners. No one had any help. When I picture Joe, I see him with a hoe, in the early evening after work, roughing up the dirt between the rows of onions. I can see retired Mr. Crawford, plump stomach bulging a bit over dark pants and pale shirt with suspenders, tying up the grapevines. Strangely, I don't think they mulched (I recall pale brown dirt between the neat rows). I suppose these families had gardens all their lives, before they moved to Exeter in the 1920s, and I imagine the vegetables saved money as well as tasted better.

We didn't garden much in comparison. Mother put in a few flowers, planted a few seeds because she wanted us to learn about it, but we learned mostly by watching Joe and Holly and talking to them



Gates Mills

One time when I was reading “To the Lighthouse” by Virginia Woolf she described a scene where children were playing croquet in the early evening on a green lawn surrounded by bushes that looked out over the sea. Immediately, I visualized the side lawn at Gates Mills, a big green square where we used to play croquet, with wickets carefully placed, hydrangeas at one side, and a huge chestnut tree in the corner near the road.

Going to Gates Mills was always a treat. Gates Mills was out in the country — down Mayfield Hill, across the Chagrin River bridge, past farm houses & country homes. Our “Gates Mills” was a rundown white frame house, probably a farmhouse originally, owned by Aunt Clara, Grampa’s sister. The furniture was a bit worn — not the best — as befitted a summer place — but it didn’t really matter, as we spent all our time outside anyway.

In my memory, Gates Mills is a blend of the exciting and different — and just slightly fearful. The insects and imagined animals like snakes and thorny bushes that could scratch made me anxious.

At the same time, how different and intriguing! Gates Mills had an outhouse, down a grassy path trodden into the side of the hill. It smelled of lime and had three holes. I was always afraid that I would drop

something — or myself! — into the hole, a fear I still have, even though my main experience with outhouses now are the neat ones in parks.

Gates Mills also had a well — not used when I was there. You took off the cover and there was the water, dark with leaves floating on it, surrounded by stones green with moss. Cool, bottomless, dark.

At Gates Mills we went swimming in the Chagrin River. It was a long walk through an open abandoned field then down into the trees of the river bottom, finally out on the muddy bank. We waded out — mud squishy underneath — into the gentle muddy flow of the river, careful not to get too deep. The river had leeches — ugh — and you had to hope one wouldn’t find you — or you’d have to pull them off and see the blood ooze afterward.

We usually went to Gates Mills for the big family get together on July 4th with the Williams family and their spouses and children. A big American flag hung on the front of the house, tables were set up on the front lawn in the open space edged by pines. I remember much bustle by the women in the kitchen, but the food escapes me.

On the Fourth of July we had fireworks after it got dark. They were set up in the middle of the big green side lawn. Men lit the wicks then ran away, and

Roman candles exploded. My cousin George — being older and a boy — was allowed to light them occasionally and run quickly away. All of us were given sparklers to run around with.

Mother must have spent a good deal of time at Gates Mills when she was growing up. She spent weeks there during the summer, I know. They had a big vegetable garden near the house that must supplied the dinner table, and I suppose they got meat and milk from farms nearby.

In those days you got to Gates Mills on the trolley. Mother told me that Daddy used to come out on the trolley to see her during the summer when they were

courting. The trolley went to the bridge, then you got off and walked the last half mile.

Why do thoughts of “Gates Mills” still give me a feeling of delight? Is it because it was country — and green — and a different world? A change from the humdrum? Or is it because Mother loved the country — and Gates Mills — and enjoyed so much the family gatherings there? Regardless, going to Gates Mills was special and I still relive that feeling of anticipation and excitement. It’s a pleasant, warm, nourishing memory. Now, it also makes me wonder just how experiences like that contribute to the adult you will become.

Rosie, the Sales Representative

In 1943, shortly after I graduated from college, I went to work in the office of a war plant in Cleveland, Ohio. The plant made electric motors, a priority item for the Navy and a myriad of war contractors: my job was to tell the hapless customers when their motor would be ready to ship. The atmosphere on the shop floor was frantic, we were always behind, and I was the one who had to inform the Navy procurer that the motors for the gun emplacements on Destroyer X would not be ready for a month.

Every morning 7:30, dressed in skirt and blouse and carrying my lunch, I went out the door to join my car pool driver and his engineer buddy. Every evening they brought me home at 5:00, getting extra gas for their car pool duty. When I got to the office, I joined thirty other women in a big room with desks jammed so close together we could barely squeeze in to sit at them. All the supervisors were men, either over 40 or 4-F, and they had little glass- partitioned offices.

When a customer called, I said sweetly, "I'll put a tracer on your motors," Then I gave Joe, our locator, the serial numbers of the motors, and Joe went out to the shop to find them. At least, I hoped he went out in the shop. Joe was an alcoholic, but with manpower so short the company never considered firing him. Sometimes he was absent for several days: sometimes it seemed that Joe and the motors had

vanished into the cavernous, noisy plant. I wasn't allowed to go out there – not suitable for a young woman from the office.

The motors were rarely finished by the promised shipping date. The tracers returned with "armature needs rewinding", "didn't pass test," "waiting for controls from Milwaukee." I took it seriously when customers got mad and accused us of slowing the war effort, although I finally realized that if they were truly desperate they phoned the Sales Manager and bullied him into shipping someone else's motor.

After work, life was dull. No men to date, no gas to go anywhere but the grocery store. My mother strategies with the ration books, the papers had daily stories about black markets in meat and rubber tires, and silk stockings were so scarce that I had to darn the runs and wear them to work.

Evenings we listened to the radio and wrote letters. Everyone my age had a husband, a brother or a boyfriend in the services. It was our duty to cheer them up with regular letters. Radio and newspapers helped us figure out where they were. We listened as the troops invaded Italy, then France. We sat numb when broadcasters described the landings in the Pacific — the terrible casualties in Iwo Jima, Leyte, Okinawa — then waited anxiously for the postman to bring a letter that told us our man was still out there.

There was an up side. Anyone could get a job, a welcome change after the depression years. The government regulated wages and you couldn't change jobs, but there was lots of overtime, and prices stayed fairly level.

But the war was inescapable — it dominated what we ate, where we went, where we worked. We didn't think about the future. Worst of all was fear for the men you loved. It was a fear shared by rich and poor, since the draft made no distinctions. Everyone had at least one person's life at stake somewhere in the world. No war since has been like it — in comparison, relatively few of us were touched by Korea, Viet Nam, or the Gulf War. In World War II almost everyone shared the burden and worked for the victory. We were close to "one nation indivisible."



Marjorie in the mid-1940s (1946?).

Joint Board

In January, 1949 [at age 27], I took the train from New York to New Brunswick to start my new job as Education Director of the Central Jersey Joint Board of the Textile Workers Union of America in New Brunswick, New Jersey. I stayed until August 1953.

This was my first experience as a “labor educator.” In fact, it was my first experience with unions. I was to work with ten locals in the Joint Board, with members in textile plants that wove carpets and woolen goods, spun thread, dyed cloth, and, our biggest group, produced bandages and other products for Johnson and Johnson.

The members were mostly second generation immigrants, often with strong loyalty to their ethnic groups—Italians, Hungarians, Polish, Latvians, Scotch. I came from a very different background — Midwest WASP — and I was always conscious of the understated differences between us

This was not a major concern in my first days on the job. Shortly after the former labor education person left, the Business Agent came in and asked me to produce (mimeograph) an organizing leaflet he could use the next morning. I got it written and finally cut the stencil, but no way could I make the mimeograph machine work. The evening wore on, with more and more ink on by hands until one of the Business

Agents rescued me. I had a lot to learn.

I was expected to help out with office chores, put out a monthly newspaper, write organizing leaflets and press releases, go to union meetings and give brief educational speeches, etc. I will not forget the time, early in my work, when the Joint Board Manager, took me to a small meeting and told me to get up and introduce myself and my job. I had never given a speech before.

As time wore on, I got new tasks — teaching stewards classes, helping with children’s Christmas parties, writing arbitration briefs, showing movies at union meetings, and serving as one of the union’s representatives on events in the wider community. It was expected that I would serve as a support and listener to the Joint Board Manager in the problems that came up with the locals, and the two of us ate lunch together every day.

Looking back on it, it seems to me I was woefully unprepared for the job. I am surprised at my courage in moving into such unknown territory. But those five years gave me a grounding in unionism that proved invaluable for the rest of my career. I know how local unions work, and why it is hard to persuade them to do things that the union may consider essential. I learned how developing personal relations with

members and local leadership helps cement union support, how hard it is to get many members to volunteer or get involved, and how much petty political squabbling there may be among local volunteer leaders or staff.

I also learned that there is a strong sense of justice among workers. And there is a lot of potential leadership among the rank and file. Few of our members had been to college and many had not finished high school, yet in every local, some stepped forward and became competent stewards and skilled local union officers.



Marjorie c.1946-50.

Fulbright

ON September 1953, I set off for England along with 125 other 20 year olds who had been fortunate enough to receive a Fulbright Scholarship. I was going to England for 9 months to study the relation between British unions and the British Labor Party. The Labor Party won its first national election and took control of the government.

Those nine months were an eye-opener that I will never forget. I was experiencing a different culture, even though the language was the same and many of the institutions similar to the U.S. When I left England I knew how pervasive culture is in the way people live and think, and how difficult it is to understand people from other countries.

What I did not realize when I applied for the Fulbright was how differently things worked in Britain. I wrote that I intended to study the relation between the British Labor Party and the unions, in the hope of learning some things we could apply, and the Committee of labor educators gave me the nod. Once In Britain, I was to learn how the British class system, British history and British political system make things far different from the U.S.

Most of my fellow Fulbright scholars were academics, doing research for their PhDs, or in some cases, going to Oxford or Cambridge for an advanced degree. I was unusual — I had no academic standing. I got the scholarship because I had been working in New Jersey in the Textile Workers Union of America

as a local education director, and there were a few Fulbright's designated for adult education.

We received a weekly stipend for living expenses. I teamed up with three other Fulbright women to rent an apartment close to Hyde Park in London. My roommate there was Joan Kinnaird, working on her thesis on English history. She became a lifelong friend.

Each of us was assigned to a mentor who oversaw our stay. In my case, Harold Shurman was the Chair of the London County Council on Education (an important political position) and a professor at the University of London. He was also a leading figure in the Workers Education Association, the major provider of education for workers in Britain.



Earlier, back in 1949, I had gone to work for the Central Jersey Joint Board of TWUA and spent 5 years as Education Director. [See *previous essay*.] There I taught classes to shop stewards, put out a quarterly newspaper, gave talks at union meetings, served on community boards, wrote and mimeographed organizing leaflets, prepared releases for the local newspaper, helped run local Christmas parties for children, and plus a range of other activities. We had ten local unions, 12,000 members, in plants ranging from a small dye shop in Trenton, to a big carpet factory in Freehold and the main factory and headquarters of Johnson and Johnson in New

Brunswick.

I came to this job from a well-off middle class home, a father who ran a small, successful factory and who disliked unions intensely. There I was working with union members, most of them second generation immigrants, with high school education at best, and lower incomes than I knew growing up. "Class" was never mentioned, but I was aware of the gulf, and so were they. Our common dedication to the union got me by.

We had members whose parents came from Hungary, Italy, Scotland and Poland. As a middle western WASP, my background was a lot different and I had to try to understand this. The Fulbright helped me understand how much I had missed.

My boss was Simon Saller, the Joint Board manager, a man in his fifties who had come from Austria-Hungary in his teens to work on the Great Lakes ore boats. Simon's years of experience organizing workers and negotiating contracts had given him skills and good judgment. We had two Business Agents, one of them Italian American and the other the son of Scottish immigrants.

Besides my responsibilities in education, I was often the face of the union to the community — going on the radio, writing the press releases, serving on the Board of the Community Chest. The Joint Board Manager spoke with a strong accent, and the union felt that many times I presented a better public image.

I see now that when I got to New Brunswick I was unprepared for this job, and I feel now that there were parts of it I would do differently today. I was also amazingly uninformed about government and U.S. politics generally. Soon, however, I found that I was

expected to go to the locals and explain the union's political goals. So began my political education.

At that time, the TWUA and other lower wage unions were focused on getting Congress to raise the minimum wage. The wage in 1949 was 75 cents an hour. If it was raised, it would raise the wages of the lowest paid worker and push up the entire wage scale in the manufacturing plants. In the textile industry, we had to get the national minimum wage raised in order to raise wages in the unorganized plants which competed with out members.

One of my jobs was to go to local meetings, explain why the minimum wage was important, and try to get people to write postcards. The membership was not very interested or receptive -- most of them knew very little about legislation or Congress, even though they were good Roosevelt Democrats.

Joint Board staff were also engaged in persuading members to agree to small deductions from their wages for the CIO Political Action Committee. This money could be used to elect people to Congress who favored the legislation we needed. First, however, the members under each contract had to vote to put this in the contract with the employer, and this required persuasive talks at union meetings.

TWUA made me a Democrat. The union taught me the how much government affected people's lives. Thus began my lifelong interest in politics.



That experience at the Joint Board eventually led me to London. The Fulbright Committee decided where you would go and selected a suitable guide for your work. Luckily I was assigned to London. My mentor was Harold Shurman, who was prominent in the work



Marjorie with her father (Herbert P. Bailey) and mother (Alice Williams Bailey), embarking for a Fulbright in England, 1952.

of the Workers Education Association, a well known member of the Labor Party and Chair of the Education Committee of the London County Council.

He immediately sent me out to night classes in the London area run by the Workers Education Association. This was the first of several shocks to my thinking, because it wasn't at all like what I considered "workers education."

The WEA was started in the early 1900's by intellectuals in the Labor Party who wanted to give workers a chance for education. In those days public school ended for most working class children at the age of 14 or 15, and they had no chance for high school or college. The WEA's aim was to fill this gap. Night classes were given in literature, economics, history and similar subjects we would consider academic. In the early 1900s the WEA was an important opportunity for workers, but by the time I got there, in the 1950s. Most of the participants were middle class people.

The WEA approach to workers education was a surprise to me. Because it was quite different from what I saw as workers ed. In the TWUA (and most unions), workers education meant union training in practical skills like grievance handling, negotiating, or running a meeting. We did a little in labor history and legislative issues, but we concentrated on teaching skills needed by the officers and stewards, who were mainly volunteers. This was education that would build the union, not the individual.

TWUA was a CIO union, one of a group of unions that organized industrially, that is everyone in the plant, regardless of job or craft, belonged to the union. In the 1930s, as the CIO organized steel, electrical,

auto shipbuilding, rubber, chemical and other plants, it was imperative to train local activists, who could serve as a communications network throughout the plant and handle worker's complaints with management. Steward (or Committeeman) training became the focus of workers education. This training also preached solidarity, having individuals from various ethnic groups work together. Britain did not have all the ethnic tensions we had, and its unions had the glue of class to provide solidarity — a very different glue

I soon became aware how much "class" determined British thinking, although World War II and later the Labor Party's victory had begun to weaken it a little.



When I left England at the end of the Fulbright, I said to myself, "That was the best year of my life." It was a year when I could do anything I wanted with my time — other than follow suggestions from my mentor, who had a light hand and did not even ask me to write a report. I found myself on a long vacation, after the years of school and working.

I was interested in my project, but wanted to know Britain in other ways. I needed to learn more about British history, browse famous churches & buildings, visit villages and seaside towns, walk the green countryside with its neat farm squares and lush hedgerows. This was my chance to experience and to explore. "Learning" like this has always seemed to me to be worthy, even if there is no set end product.

That was the ultimate theme for my year, although I'm not sure I knew it at the time: gaining an understanding and appreciation of England.

Mother, Men & Marriage

Growing up in the 1930s, I assumed that my life would follow my mother's trajectory — college, a brief period at work, then marriage and children. In high school it bothered me that I didn't have any boyfriends—and by college years I felt bad I had no dates, but even so, I didn't worry much about what I would do when I graduated.

Graduation came, I went home and got a clerk's job in a war plant. Still no boyfriend, but it was wartime.

After a year I left the shelter of my parents to go to New York City — the glamorous thing to do in those days. I got an unimportant job, and lived with four other women all of whom were waiting for their men to come home from the war. No one had any dates and I think it didn't bother me as much. But I was not looking for a career — I was just enjoying myself and growing up.

Through my job I got interested in the labor movement, and eventually landed a job working for a union in a town in New Jersey. Here I was challenged by a new working environment — I felt keenly the difference in the background of the union members and my own — and by a job that asked me to do a lot of new things. I wanted to succeed and I was really interested in what I was doing and I had a "cause".

I still saw marriage as the ultimate goal — the way to happiness. I tried unsuccessfully to find

boyfriends in New Brunswick, but I was also absorbed in my work. In the next ten years I went to England on a Fulbright, worked in Illinois on a labor education project, and came to Washington to work for the CIO. I acquired a few boyfriends, none of them really of much interest to me. I felt a failure — around me everyone was married with kids, my mother and father were worried and disappointed in me, and I was getting nowhere.

At the age of 35, I remember sitting in my apartment living room in Washington and contemplating whether I should go to a psychiatrist. I remember making a list of pro's and cons — one of the pro's was "maybe it isn't your fault." I felt I was missing the good life by not being married, although I don't think I actually was lonely or bored. By this time I was quite caught up in being successful in my career although I found its demands scary at times.

I was frightened to death of the psychiatrist and I never really felt good with him. but I went faithfully. I had a serious boyfriend and a union boyfriend (married) who didn't really take me seriously, but I was not emotionally involved with them. Finally, I met Jack, ten years younger, a Jewish boy from Brooklyn who was interested in art, and after several years of a rather low-key affair, I persuaded him to marry me.

Goal accomplished. I decided to leave work and



live the life my mother had always held out to me — cooking nice dinners, gardening, baking bread, etc, etc. By this time we had a house. I began to garden more, took up birding again, enjoyed hikes and concerts with Jack on weekends, got to know my neighbors.

But it wasn't enough. I began to take a few part-time jobs — steward training for the pressmen's local, a series of talks on the poverty program for labor people, a job collecting materials coming out of local poverty programs, etc. I realized I preferred to work, and, 6 years after quitting work, I went back to work part-time for the AFL-CIO.

The marriage was not smooth. We had a lot of fights — Jack did not have the social graces or the background of family and community responsibility that I had. He was not ambitious, preferring to climb the ladder slowly at work. He didn't share my political philosophy, either. My concern for the poor, for discrimination, etc., didn't really interest him. But we hung on together. My job was the central focus of my life and he didn't mind when I worked late or traveled.

I liked having someone at home, someone to come home to, someone to talk to, even about mundane things. That is the big advantage of marriage.

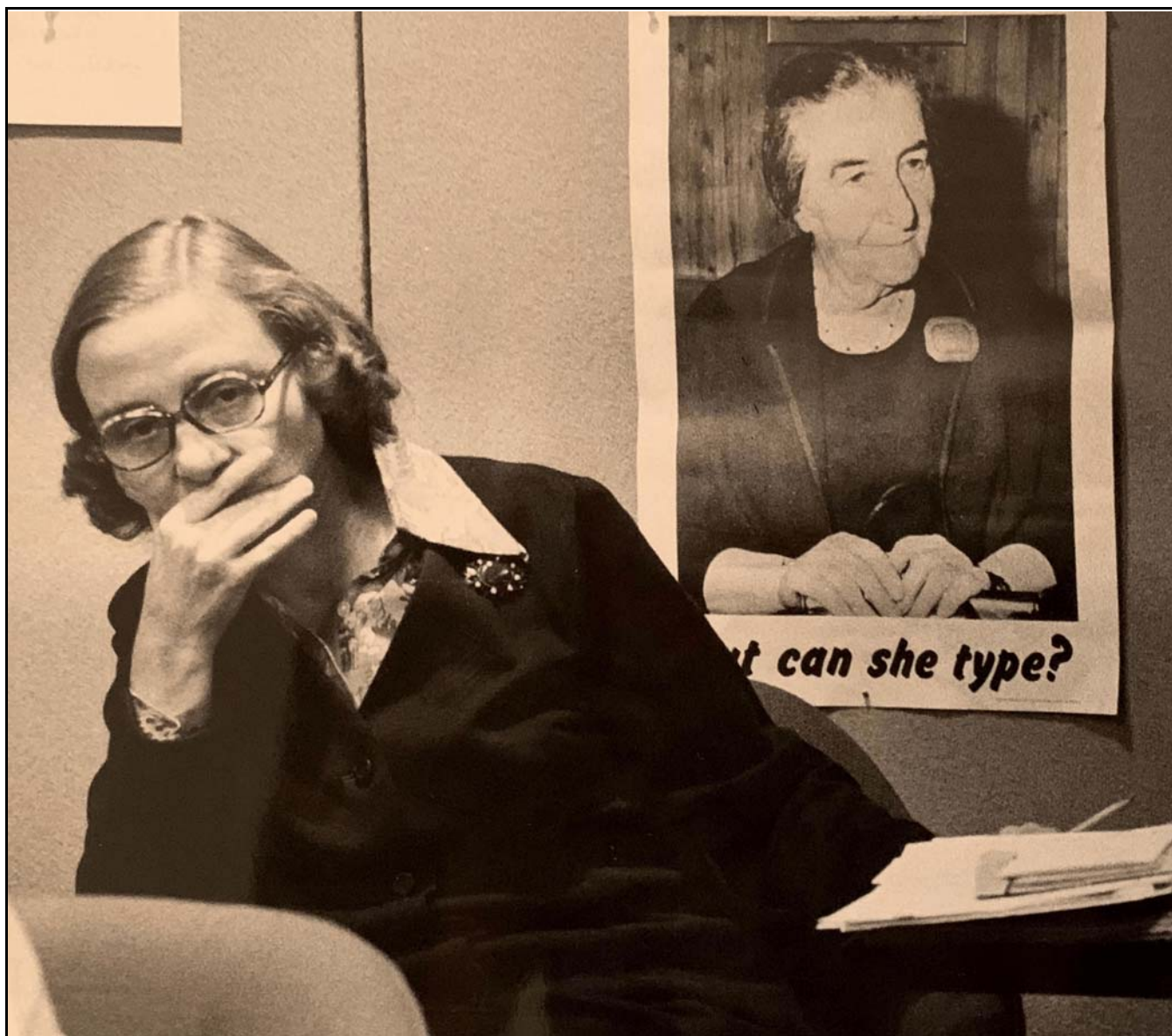
Looking back, I really don't understand why I had such a problem with men and boyfriends. Possibly because I had no brother? Maybe because I was afraid of my father's temper? I may have picked up vibes from Mother about marriage being no fun. But basically I expected to have a home like Exeter Road. But I was certainly afraid of men. And the psychiatrist was no help at all.



Editors Note: As friends and family will attest, Marjorie's devotion to Jack, manifest in how she helped him accommodate the challenges of Parkinson's disease as they unfolded and then in tending him during his final years of incapacity, was absolute. No one could find a more loving, attentive — and, equally, resolute — caregiver. Jack died in 2017, marking over 50 years of marriage.



Marge tends to Jack while they wait for their ride following a visit to the National Gallery of Art , 2013 (photo by Douglas Allchin).



The Personality Test

For my 90th birthday party I hung up a set of photos illustrating my life, for the guests' entertainment. The earliest one was a photo of myself at the age of 3, with my mother and little sister. I am sitting on a stool, in a pretty dress, holding an open book on my lap, looking out at the photographer with a bright inquiring look.

This picture has been hanging in the dining room ever since the party, so I see it as I walk by. I ask myself –what was I like then ? What have I become? Who am I? I don't mean dates, family, career —I'm thinking about personality, temperament. How much is nature? experience?

The photo in the book on my lap suggest one feature. I remember my parents marveling at how “smart,” I was – at an early age I could name correctly the fish pictures in the National Geographic. This became an identifying quality during my school years. I knew I was “smart,” and I lived up to that by getting all A's in school and graduating with honors in college.

The other subtle direction I absorbed was to be “good” –honest, obedient, helpful, polite to relatives and friends. I dutifully followed this –I always did my homework, teachers liked me. I was supposed to be nice to my little sister too, but we fought a lot. Mother would tell me “don't be bossy,” and I know that is still one of my “faults.”

I grew up. I did well at work — I am deft enough for most jobs and I was brought up to be diligent and work hard. I knew I was supposed to be kind and supportive, not bossy, and I tried. I was supposed to contribute something worthwhile to the world. Beyond that I don't seem to have had many guidelines. I was mostly focused on what I wanted out of life – what would make me happy. When I thought about my “personality,” I saw a ghostly figure with no color.

Then, when I was in my fifties and well- established in my career, I took the Myers Briggs temperament test. Myers/ Briggs is loosely adapted from on the theories of Carl Jung, and it is often used in management training programs. Trainers use it to get people to see themselves in a different way and to realize that people they work with are not just difficult or annoying – they may have a different way of looking at the world.

To me, Myers Briggs was a revelation – it gave me a new framework to see myself. It provided interesting answers to who am I?

First of all, I found out that I was an extrovert, defined as a person who gets their energy from others, who likes to socialize, hang out and do things *with others*. I was thrilled. Our society considers extroverts the best, because they like people, fit well in groups and institutions, enjoy cocktail parties and

sports bars. Learning that I was apparently a strong extrovert made me feel “popular,” something I had desperately wanted to be in high school and never achieved.

It was a useful marriage insight too.. I could see why my husband was a pain at times. He’s an introvert — a solitary. He gets his energy by going inside, by quiet thinking. He does not want to discuss ideas or problems, and he does not care about dinner parties or other social gatherings. Earlier, I had given up on trying to change him. I simply left him home with a book, but I felt he was deliberately being difficult. I found out with M/B that he was born different.

On another set of questions, the result was disappointing. I turned out to be an S, a practical, down to earth person who relies on facts and experience to deal with the world. I wanted to be an N, people who are imaginative, innovative, act on intuition, go around with airy aspirations.

Try as I could, the test made me out an S. I had only a whiff of N — I read poetry and face the future, not the past, but basically I’m earthbound. I knew I was pegged when the book said that S’s think in terms of happiness and optimism while N’s deal with an axis of sensitivity and awareness. So much for the inner hope of being an unconventional creative artist!

Then we get to the dimension labeled T and F. Do you tend to make decisions based on logic, analysis and principles (Thinking) or do you choose to be more personal and look at the situation with sympathy and a kind eye for the people involved (Feeling). I knew right away: I was a person who others tended to view as hard- hearted and unfeeling.

I’m not empathetic — it annoys me when my sick husband forgets his glasses. You could say that T’s are the kind of person who sees a beggar on the street and says “why don’t they get a job?”

I know this about myself, and I try to atone, but MB has given me leave to be as I am. It’s a relief to know that I’m not the caretaker type, I’m not nurturing. I do not want to devote every hour of my life to my husband’s welfare, and I should not feel guilty. It’s too bad he didn’t marry a nice F type empathetic nurse.

The last dimension is J and P. This can be summarized with the question “Do you prefer closure and settling things or do you prefer to keep options open and fluid?” I like to get things decided, and then stick to the plan. I’m a big J.

Luckily you don’t run into many P’s in your life. I had a bad time years ago when I got an assignment at work to set up a conference with a woman named Juliet. We could talk and talk, but she could not and would not make decisions on the program. My way of operating is simple and efficient — map out the main structure several weeks beforehand, then mop up the details.

It turned out that Juliet was a P. P people see the world in flux – a better idea or a new person or a new situation might come along at any time – the world is full of possibilities and constant change. It’s best not to tie yourself down to a date or an itinerary or program until the last moment.. I find these people weak and shiftless, although I know that is unfair. I never worked with Juliet again — P people take the patience of a saint.

The M/B writers have taken all these categories and set up four temperaments, based loosely on

Jung. They have the names of Greek gods. I would have liked to be the temperament of Apollo or Prometheus, but no luck. I am an SJ, an Epimethean, named after Epimetheus, a minor God who married Pandora and had a hard life. According to M/B, SJs want to serve and be useful in the world. They want to belong and be part of groups and institutions. The description fits me — I spent my life in the institutions of the labor movement, and I enjoyed being an in-person in a nationwide group. While I gripe like anyone in an institution, my faith in union goals and vision remains to this day.

Like the usual SJ, I believe in work before play, duty before pleasure. I see now why my younger sister baffles me — she has some other god — she is the grasshopper to my ant. Brought up in an SJ household, she nevertheless fritters her life away from my standpoint.

Now, writing this piece and revisiting M/B, I feel uneasy. I'm not sure it's really kosher. Is this just pop psychology, the kind you hear on PBS during money marathons? I've found it useful — and even reassuring. But I wonder, is this all I am?



Photo by Carolyn Jacobs

90, and Counting

For my 90th birthday I gave myself an elegant birthday party, for fifty friends and relatives. Since I've never had a big party, I was worried and anxious for weeks beforehand, fearing it would not be a success.

The day turned out sunny and warm with trees blooming all along the street. An hour beforehand, a friend walked in with balloons for the front steps, as promised, and the caterer arrived with baskets and trays and three black-suited serving people. They proceeded to set up the dining room table with a stunning arrangement of food and flowers.

As guests came up the steps, I welcomed them at the door and gave them name tags. They roamed around the buffet, then moved to the back porch for a view of the garden and a glass of prosecco or wine. People mixed. They enjoyed meeting my sister and her daughters and they were interested to talk to other friends of mine they didn't know. I floated around chatting briefly — I enjoyed the prosecco, but there was no time to eat.

The birthday cake was the highlight of the afternoon. I had specified a big chocolate cake with raspberry filling and buttercream frosting. Everyone gathered round when we set it on a table in the front hall. I thanked my guests, then there were tributes and comic poems to me, we blew out the candles and the cake was cut. It was delicious, superb, generally agreed to be spectacular.

I was quite pleased with the party. Everyone had enjoyed themselves. I felt loved and appreciated. I even wondered if I should have one next year for our 50th wedding anniversary.

The next day, I took the extra chairs back upstairs, put the guest towels back in the drawer, and returned the untidy pile of seed catalogs and to-do mail to the window shelf.

It required some ingenuity to eat up the leftovers — turkey in lunch sandwiches, ham with breakfast eggs the vegetables added to salads. I rationed what was left of the chocolate cake, allowing my husband one small piece a day but giving myself one at lunch and one as a snack.

I left the photos up. For the party I had hung a series of photographs of my life - me as a child of three, me growing up in Cleveland in the 1930's, sitting outside an apartment in Greenwich Village after college, teaching a class in a union school. Hanging in the living room was a wedding photo of Jack and me, looking young and vibrant, and below it, a snapshot taken in the garden last year, fifty years later.

The set of photos were like the boards you see at memorial services. They may come in handy in the future. When I look at them, I thank my parents for a loving, peaceful childhood, and I marvel at the drive I had during my career.

The party left wonderful memories, but life went on. Same old, same old. Exercise class, what to have for dinner, bills to pay, Jack's pill schedule. Ninety is such a benchmark that I had not thought about the years ahead. Between the party and the photos, I had killed myself off. "What came next?"

It bothered me. I wasn't pleased to be *ninety*, despite the congratulations. I like a lot of different people and activities, and here I was, at this fragile age where I had to use a cane and watch out for my health.

"Accept your limitations." "Age is a series of losses." How dreary! Some truth, though. I had to "accept" my bum knee. My sick husband is house-bound, and he never was much for conversation. I have given up travel abroad. I miss a lot of museum exhibits. It's hard for me to get down to ground level in the garden, so I've felt I had better cut back on the new plants.

I ration my energy. I've shifted a lot of housework off to the women who come in some days to take care of Jack and help around the house. I call my neighbor when I need to change a ceiling light, get my gardener to carry furniture to the attic, and phone the electrician or the plumber at the hint of a problem.

Then one day recently I looked at the back steps and saw big patches of paint peeling off. They looked terrible. I have painted them five or six times in the past. But after all, I'm ninety. I said to myself, "You should not be doing this."

Although I knew that a handyman would do a crummy job, I made a phone call. The man asked \$80 an hour. Enough already. I dug out my old painting pants and unearthed the scraper. The prep took me

three hours, then I quit for the day. The next morning I bought the paint and washed the steps, stopping in time for a nap. The base coat went on easily the next day, and I did a little gardening as a reward. Two days later the final coat, and voila, they look great!

This has been a revelation. I'm much encouraged about myself. I can still do little jobs like this. It's very limiting to be forever making sure you're not doing too much, not getting tired, protecting your back. I do have to be careful on stairs, but maybe I don't need all those naps.

When I took a break on the step job, I would walk around the garden. With my new optimism, I'm going to change it, dig up a lot of failing perennials and put in native plants that will attract bees and birds. It's a busy season — soon I will be starting to go up to the Park every morning to watch for the migrants coming through. I'm going to take my stool and sit when necessary, but I expect to go most days.

I've always enjoyed writing and now I've agreed to write a nature column, a kind of blog, every month for our neighborhood e-mail publication. It makes me feel like a reporter — I'm looking at my neighborhood with a new eye. The blog needs photos — I may have to take up the camera.

For me "what's next?" seems to mean more of the same, with new twists. I'm getting used to being 90. Sometimes I wish I had more leisure — time to sit on the porch and read. Maybe that's next. We'll see..

Let life be a work in progress.

|mpressions



The garden at 2919 Brandywine St., 2011



Marjorie birding in Rock Creek Park, age 92.

Marjorie Rachlin, The Birder

She perches wrenlike on her labeled “Birding Stool” with a message on its seat for the maintenance yard workers: “Do Not Take.” Her ears and eyes are alert for songbirds — the tanagers, grosbeaks, orioles and many varieties of warbler that migrate through the park each spring.

She’s not a “lister” like the “hard-core birders” who make a written note of every bird they see. Marjorie Rachlin, 92, who won her Girl Scout birding badge 80 years ago, is more of a naturalist, she says, interested in “who’s nesting here and what they are eating.”

There’s no better way to see spring come than being out in the park with the birders, she says. “It’s really a nice group of people who bird.”

Rachlin learned about a small number of Rock Creek birders some 15 years ago. Their numbers have since swelled, driven by the Internet, where they record and share their findings. Forty or more may be out at 6:30 on a May morning to watch the migration.

Unlike in other parts of Washington, here it doesn’t matter what your day job is, the former labor educator says. What does matter is how good a birder you are and that you abide by Rock Creek birding etiquette: Don’t block others’ view; help other people see birds; don’t talk too loud.

A repeated high-pitched bird song sounds. Silence falls. Eyes go up. A row of binoculars is trained on a rare Cape May warbler.

— Frances Stead Sellers
Washington Post (July 11, 2014)



It was always a joy to see Marjorie during her birding outings at the maintenance yard and at the nature center and to talk about the park and what she and I were seeing. She was always so upbeat and engaging and so intrigued and passionate about the natural world and in sharing her knowledge and sense of wonder with others. She especially loved Rock Creek Park and was a strong ally and advocate for the park and for the protection of its natural resources. She wrote many informative and delightful articles for the Forest Hills Connection about several natural history topics such as bird migration, wildflowers, trees, mushrooms, dragonflies, and much more. I dearly enjoyed our frequent talks about the park and its flora and fauna. What an amazing life well lived!

—Bill Yeaman, Rock Creek Park Naturalist

For over 20 years I managed the volunteer program at the National Zoo. I actually interviewed Marjorie for the Invertebrate Exhibit Interpreter program. While we are not supposed to have favorites, it is human nature and I was very fond of Marjorie. She has quite a strength to her, but was also so friendly and welcoming to our visitors, volunteers, and staff. She contributed so much.

—Helen Moore, National Zoo



When you meet Marjorie (Marge) Rachlin, the last thing you think about is age. Her voice, demeanor, stance and passion spell 'woman in charge.' The fact that she is 91 – and the oldest volunteer of the Friends of the Library – is of no relevance whatsoever. That twinkle in her eye could mean almost anything.

—Barbara Parker, Friends of the Library, Chevy Chase



Mono Lake, California. In the foreground: the research boat funded by Marjorie Rachlin.

Marge was a long-time member of the Mono Lake Committee, a non-profit citizens' group dedicated to protecting and restoring the Mono Basin ecosystem, educating the public about Mono Lake and the impacts on the environment of excessive water use, and promoting cooperative solutions that protect Mono Lake. Marjorie visited Mono Lake only a few times in her life, but she was captivated by this ecosystem that supported such a rich diversity of birds. Marge knew that the Mono Lake Committee had a small staff and her contributions could make a difference. She was thoughtful in her giving and selected projects that could not be done without philanthropic investment.

—Anna Christensen, Mono Lake Committee

Marge and her late husband Jack were longtime members of the Smithsonian American Art Museum's family. Their generous support of the Jack and Marjorie Rachlin Intern Fund is an inspiring legacy of "giving back" by creating accessible opportunities for young people to explore museum careers. Marge had a wonderful curiosity about American art, artists and movements. She never missed an exhibition and read SAAM catalogues with great interest. She brought insights from her many passions from birding to the labor movement to the way she understood the American experience through art.

—Stephanie Stebich, Director, Smithsonian American Art Museum



Marjorie Rachlin, 1922-2021

Labor Educator, Women's Rights Advocate, and Naturalist

by Joy Allchin & Sharon Simon

Marjorie Rachlin, age 99, dedicated her life to the labor movement, women's rights, the environment and the arts.

Marjorie was born in Cleveland, Ohio on February 23, 1922 to Herbert Perry Bailey, a tool factory owner, and Alice Williams Bailey, a former Latin teacher. She earned her B.A. in English at Wells College in 1943, then went to New York City to look for a job, which she said was the fashionable thing to do for a young woman who was not getting married. After taking a job in a publishing firm, she learned of the labor movement through one of their newsletters. That encounter launched her career of more than 50 years in workers' education.

In 1947 she got a job with the Joint Board of the Textile Workers Union of America, CIO, in New Jersey, and rose to the position of Education Director. In an interview, she said that she was frequently chosen to be the public face of the union because of her polished speech and her snappy appearance, complete with white gloves and hat. She wrote, "I came to this job from a well-off middle-class home, a father who ran a small, successful factory and who disliked unions intensely. There I was working with

union members, most of them second generation immigrants with high school education at best, and lower incomes than I knew growing up. 'Class' was never mentioned, but I was aware of the gulf, and so were they. Our common dedication to the union got me by." Much of her job involved working with union members to advocate politically for a higher federal minimum wage.

Around this time she learned that her father was planning to air-condition the offices at his Cleveland factory, and she convinced him to extend the plan to include the plant floor for the comfort of the workers as well. The Rotor Tool Company subsequently received a significant national award for this progressive action.

In 1952, Marjorie went to England as a Fulbright scholar with the University of London to study labor relations under the newly elected British Labor Party government. In an interview, she said her greatest take-away was learning that British workers were usually locked into low-paying jobs by their social class. She returned with renewed commitment to fighting for worker's rights and opportunities.

After coming home to the states, she moved to

Washington, D.C. to continue work in labor education, including eight years as Education Associate for the International Association of Machinists, AFL-CIO. During those years she further expanded her world with her marriage to Jack Rachlin, a geologist of Russian Jewish heritage. They shared interests in gardening, travel, and cuisine, but most of all, in modern art. They were frequent visitors and supporters of numerous art museums, with a special interest in Smithsonian American Art Museum, whose summer interns they hosted for brunch each year. During their frequent visits to New York they toured the galleries, often returning home with a carefully selected piece to add to the extensive collection on display at their home.

In 1970, Marjorie began her sixteen years as Senior Staff Associate at the George Meany Center for Labor Studies in Silver Spring as one of its founding staff. Over the years she ran programs on teaching techniques for officers and staff of various unions and conducted leadership programs for women union members. She continued to consult and teach with the Meany Center into the 2000's, even after her 80th birthday.

In 1988, she was recognized for her seminal contributions to the Southern School for Union Women with the establishment of a scholarship in her name. Former professor and collaborator Judi King observed, "What Marge established so long ago led to the education of more than 2000 Southern union women, who came to leadership positions — or who fought for leadership positions — at a time when women were not often found in those roles. Many of those women went on to hold office in their local unions and to move into higher-level positions at the

district, regional, or national levels."

Marjorie's passionate advocacy for the rights of women included support of women's causes and women candidates for office. According to Ellen Malcolm, founder of Emily's List, "Marjorie Rachlin was a passionate advocate for helping women run for office. She found so many ways to lend a helping hand and cheer them on. The Congress of the United States looks different today because women like Marjorie Rachlin stood up and said, 'I'm going to change that.'"

She never forgot her dedication to working men and women. At age 94 she had a minor car accident with a parked ambulance while driving on Connecticut Avenue, and, after being invited to wait for the police inside with the EMTs, came away with the full story on their families, their incomes, their working conditions, and their relationship with their supervisors.

After retirement, Marjorie followed her love of nature to garden and to advise her many friends and family members about their gardens, to volunteer with the invertebrates at the National Zoo, to advocate for bird habitats in Rock Creek Park and elsewhere, and to write nature articles. She brought her legendary intellectual curiosity and leadership skills to book clubs, art museums, community organizations, and social and political causes. She never ceased undertaking new endeavors. She read voraciously, constantly increasing her knowledge in multiple areas of interest. Most importantly, she enjoyed spending time with her friends. There was nothing she enjoyed more than meeting new people and getting to know them. And others, in turn, were enriched by her mentoring and support, and by her outspoken advocacy for truth.

