

*M*on pauvre
jardin. Il souffre à mes
mains.

That's my pigeon-French lament ["My poor garden. It suffers at my hands."] for saying that this year, the word "weedpatch" is no joke. My gardens are a wreck, choked with dandelions and violets and some tall things with tiny downy white daisies on top.

Hey, lay off. I've been busy and it's been far too dry to weed, except for today, September 12, which is the morning after a huge soaking and more-than-long-awaited thunderstorm. Alas, I'm in the office typing while the dandelions grow even more gargantuan. Salad, anyone?

Like I said, my life is full. It becomes even more full every time I stand stock-still and try to listen to what God seems to have in store for me. I'm a reluctant listener, I guess, for I haven't yet heard a clear message. I do seem to have more than a full plate—how could I be too busy to garden? Shameful.

As my faithful readers know, I had become "burned-out" producing this newsletter, largely because I felt that my writing skills were not maturing and my interests were changing, if still undefined. Procrastination has ensued. Endless debating. Funnel clouds of thoughts (doubts?) have continue to pound my brain. What do I want to write? How do I progress? Why has a vision eluded me?

All I can say is that the experiences that will lead me to clarity are still piling up. One of the most dramatic lessons occurred during the last month, when we received—by certified mail—notice that computer-leasing giant Comdisco Corporation had petitioned the Village of Richmond to annex and rezone its 1,100 acre hunting retreat and nature preserve for 2,200 houses plus offices and

The View from the Editor's Garden



industry. Since this land is in our backyard—just over the fence—you can imagine our alarm.

Suffice it to say, the controversy erupted in the tiny town of Richmond (400 households) like Mount St. Helen's. Despite many people's best efforts to delay a decision for planning's sake, the re-zoning took just six weeks to accomplish. I suppose the lure of mega-growth and income for the town was just too enticing for the village board to refuse. Those of us who moved here to avoid congestion and the costs of new services could tell a different story.

Now an ocean of houses and townhouses will be built. Woe to our water table, woe to the already bad traffic on Illinois Route 12, but especially woe to the 80 nests of herons, rare fish, native stand of tamarack trees [*Larix laricina*], and five endangered birds that live on the glacial hills and bogs that grace this enormous parcel of open land. As if suggesting that his opponents were misguided in wanting to protect both birds and trees, Comdisco's front man, Ron Galowich [Madison Realty, Chicago] sarcastically noted that the herons kill the oaks they roost in. I believe him, for [heron] doo-doo is a subject about which most developers can speak with great authority.

"If you are really serious and love what you do, commit the time and the excellence will come".

—Floyd Swink

I hope you will join me in urging Comdisco [6111 N. River Rd., Rosemont, IL 60018] to sell the property instead to Illinois' open space agencies. The late founder of Comdisco, Ken Pontikes, loved the out-of-doors. Leaving a 1,100 acre legacy to Illinois and the Midwest would be a real tribute to his vision.

Unfortunately, the McHenry County Conservation District's lack of local salesmanship does not help the cause of open space. Indeed, in many respects, this was not a vote for development as much as a vote against the Conservation District. Long-time residents here call them the "conservation gods".

I take their point. Open space takes farmland off the tax rolls without replacement revenue. Instead of a "hit and run" acquisition mentality, the open space and regional planning agencies need to partner with small towns like Richmond, to teach them how to be more financially innovative than to simply build more cost-creating subdivisions and mini-malls. Certainly there are 21st century strategies for growth that can be implemented here so that we can have quality of life, open space, and solvency.

In personal terms, this re-zoning is a true "reversal of fortune" for John and me. I guess we didn't think that Comdisco would sell out so soon, and so blatantly. And, closer to

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Jens Jensen Lives!

Congratulations are also in store for Chicago landscape designer and historian Jo Ann Nathan, who is the newly-named director of the Jens Jensen Legacy Project, part of Chicago's Department of Cultural Affairs. I recently received the Project's beautifully-designed first newsletter, which announced several initiatives. There will be an exhibition of Jensen's life and legacy in 2001-2002; a Jens Jensen award at the Chicago Metro History Fair; a design charette in conjunction with the *Botanica* exhibition at the Chicago Cultural Center; a series of posters for CTA buses; and the creation of a Jens Jensen room in his former office at the Humboldt Park Stables. If you wish to get the JJLP newsletter, call (312) 742-1772 or e-mail jensen@win-starmail.com.

Children's Gardens in Chicago

Lucky kids! There are some great new Chicago-area places for children to explore the world of plants. First, the Garfield Park Conservatory, located on the west side of Chicago (its fern room was designed by Jens Jensen), has opened its \$2.8 million Elizabeth Morse Genius Children's Garden. I was pleased to attend its gala opening. The educational programming in store for kids, in addition to all the intriguing plants used in this hall, is exciting to anticipate.

Up at the Chicago Botanic Garden (Glencoe, IL), 100 arborvitae were planted to form a maze for kids to follow. According to landscape designer Cheri Allen, whose Wilmette, IL company, Yes, We Care, helped build the maze, the CBG Children's Garden also features a tunnel made out of willow branches, tree roots exposed behind glass, and boxes filled with bugs, which the kids can peer at by removing the lids. (Now we know what CBG staff

does with all the slugs and grubs they find in the garden. Ooo, gross!)

Woodland Habitat CD-ROM Available from IDNR

Way cool! More than 400 Illinois woodland species of mammals, reptiles, birds, amphibians, fish, arthropods, segmented worms, plants, fungi, protists and bacteria can be seen in full color on this new CD-ROM (accessible both on Windows and Macintosh computers). 83 of the species make sounds! These have been distributed for free to elementary schools, but your's can be had by calling (217) 524-4126 or teachkids@dnrmail.state.il.us. By the way, just what is a "protist"?

Just What Do Mosquitoes Crave Most?

The answer: toe jam, perhaps spread with a little Limburger cheese. Under the "I kid you not" category of *The Weedpatch Gazette*, I quote entomologist Daniel L. Kline: "I wore socks for 12 hours on three consecutive days. When I wasn't wearing the socks, I put them in a sealed plastic bag... I also found mosquitoes love Limburger cheese. Interestingly enough, the main ingredient in the cheese is a bacterium that can be found on the human foot," he says. Note: Limburger cheese was first made in The Netherlands by monks. They trampled the cheese with their feet to get the finished product.

Now wasn't that information alone worth the price of a year's subscription?



The View (continued from p. 1)

home, by the time the deal was inked, Comdisco's gravel driveway (which abuts our property) had been upgraded to a residential street. To do that either wipes out our woods or our neighbor's bungalow.

While I appreciate that lots of asphalt does minimize weed growth, this is an unwelcome hazard to my landscape plans. How much effort do I now put against planting more wildflowers in our woods and more roses in our gardens?

Lest you think me a complete brat for complaining about our land alone, let me say that the United States is too full of the same depressing stories. This conflict over saving beauty, quiet, and tradition just has to stop.



So what does the future hold for *The Weedpatch Gazette*? Dunno, really, I still can't promise, but the good news is that I'm hiring a talented editor, Kathy Coffman, to work with me to produce the Winter, 2001 issue. This will free up some time for me, resulting in a happier, less frazzled Editor-in-Chief.

Wish me luck—I'm hoping that I can actually find time to go outside. I'm going to pull those darn weeds while cursing those who have changed the way of life in this quiet small town forever.

As always, enjoy!