

Village Voices

In Our Own Words

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FARMING AT PENNSWOOD

by Doug Meaker

Fifty years ago in Milford, NJ, we were able to have a large 30' x 50' unfenced vegetable garden and grow any flowers, trees, or shrubs we cared to. But gradually, as the fields out back were no longer planted in corn, the deer moved into our development for their food. They came in broad daylight.

One morning, I counted 20 deer in our small backyard. What we could grow came to be limited to what the deer allowed us to grow—a selection of flowers and *no* vegetables. Our first vermin invader was a groundhog, who set up housekeeping at the lower edge of the garden; I dealt with him. One great benefit of moving to Pennswood is that I don't have to worry about deer or groundhogs in our Community Garden.

So, when I started gardening here more than 11 years ago, I decided that there were so many good vegetables

available—generally better than I could grow—that only fresh peas and sweet corn were worth my effort.

My first go was with sweet corn. I took over a plot that was so wet through the previous year that its user had declared it “a swamp” and asked to move. Given that and the relatively short window for corn (about 1-2 weeks), I divided the area into four 5' x 5' subplots to plant in rotation and fertilized each area thoroughly with 10-10-10. Harkening back to the stories we grew up with, instead of planting the seeds in rows as the package recommended, I mounded up sixteen 10” hills in each subplot. I planted 12 corn seeds in the top of each hill figuring the seeds wouldn't rot, but the roots could go down to get the water they needed. After the seeds sprouted, I thinned the sprouts to six plants in each hill. That made 96 plants in each subplot, close enough together to get good pollination.

Every couple of weeks through the season, I planted a different subplot with a different variety. Not all the

plants produced, but I did get about 260 ears of fresh sweet corn off that 20 x 20 plot. Far from being too wet, it actually needed watering at least once.

One thing I promised myself when I started this was that I was *not* going to bring new vermin to the Community Garden. I was concerned about enticing raccoons. The second year was not nearly so successful. We got off to a good start with the first batch of corn, but then I noticed the ears in the second batch were being pulled down and stripped the way a raccoon would do, so I quit. I've found out since that squirrels will also pull ears down. Also the ears were just nubbins and not worth the effort—I'd probably not fertilized adequately. At any rate, it was game over for the sweet corn; I'd buy mine.

My next foray was peas—not the kind where you eat the pod and all, but the kind you shell from the pod. Robin and I enjoyed fresh peas from a few pods with our lunch. I planted the peas in four batches and trained the vines on net supported by push poles. I fertilized them with starter (low nitrogen) fertilizer to promote root growth, relying on the plants to supply their own nitrogen. This system worked well for a couple of years. We never got a whole meal of peas, but we did get enough to add to our lunches.

Then disaster struck in the form of weak and withered vines. It appeared that a soil fungus had taken hold, which rotted the roots. Plants pulled up had no root ball. This was the effect of growing peas year after year in the same spot and could only be solved by not planting them there for three to four years.

So I moved the peas to an edge of my main bed, inter-planting with zinnias, which bloom later. That worked okay for a while, until I noticed very few seeds sprouted, whether because of voles or birds or just plain rot. I noted that, once sprouted, the plants weren't disturbed (except for nibbles by a rabbit). Last year I tried pre-sprouting the seeds and transplanting. That didn't work at all. Who knows about this year? Those peas were very tasty and aren't available in the market.

My last effort in the veggie line was tomatoes. We have a pot on our balcony that keeps us nicely supplied with small red and yellow tomatoes for salads and eating in season. But there was a half plot next door that was going empty. So I decided to raise tomatoes for the Pennswood kitchen. I bought a few plants, but mostly used leftovers from fellow gardeners who had more than they needed. I think I had 18 plants in all. I supported them in wire cages and plastic supports. I fed them with 10-10-10 once or twice and watered when I remembered. I think my most constant task that summer was

picking the potato beetles off the plants. Someone raised potatoes that summer and, while the beetles much prefer potatoes, they will also go for any other member of the nightshade family in the area.

Starting in August, I harvested about 25 pounds of tomatoes for the kitchen. Then I took sick on Labor Day and was laid up for about two weeks at the height of the season. Jennie Hollingshead came to the rescue; she picked buckets full. And her late husband Irv delivered the buckets to the kitchen on his cart (The Hollingshead Trucking Company). I recall she said they delivered another 75 pounds to the kitchen.

What did Mary Cooley and her staff get? Some of the saddest looking tomatoes ever—full of splits and scars. But, true to her promise that the kitchen would accept whatever came their way, they took them. She said, “It’s amazing what a little work with a sharp knife will do.” But that was my one and only recent effort in tomato farming.

It’s difficult to think anything but pleasant thoughts while eating a homegrown tomato.

Lewis Grizzard

A SHORT COURSE IN MODERN ARCHITECTURE

by Kay Silberfeld

When I lived in Mies van der Rohe’s Highfield House, an apartment building in Baltimore, my favorite time was during a snowstorm. Then, looking out the wide expanse of windows, I felt I was inside a child’s snow globe.

My apartment was just at the tree-line with a pretty suburban view over houses and gardens. By contrast, a friend’s view from her apartment on the other side of Mies’s rectangular slab, was a cityscape of high rise buildings. At night, with their lights on, that view was quite spectacular.

Walking into the downstairs lobby was an emotional lift . . . all that verticality! The lobby was a high-ceilinged, glassed-in area. With its two light-colored squares of carpet, each under a low glass-topped table (square!) and two Eames slingback leather chairs, the area looked like a display at the Museum of Modern Art.

But, once in my apartment, I found all that geometry and glass less appealing. Although it was beautiful in its simplicity, it did not create a cozy, inviting living space. Even my non-modern furniture and paintings did not visually warm it. In addition, the interior was not well crafted—the

doors did not meet squarely, and the kitchen and bathroom fixtures were shoddy.

I don't know the specific effect all that starkness had on me and my guests. I do know that the bedroom was not a comforting place to be during a bad bout of flu. There were no places to hide.

After about five years, I left Highfield House and moved into the second floor of an old house in the suburbs, surrounded by trees. It was cozy and comfortable, and there I enjoyed having visitors.

I've not lived in another modern building since.

The trouble is, you cannot grow just one zucchini. Minutes after you plant a single seed, hundreds of zucchini will barge out of the ground and sprawl around the garden, menacing the other vegetables. At night, you will be able to hear the ground quake as more and more zucchinis erupt.

Dave Barry

BRIGHT BRUCE

by James Chandler

In 1962, the Children's Hospital was part of the University of Oregon Medical School Hospital in Portland, and when this event occurred, I was the senior surgical resident at Children's. There were few surgical beds, and my "staff" consisted of an intern (Bruce) and me. This hospital received phone calls from all over Oregon, sometimes even northern California, western Idaho, and a small region of southern Washington from physicians wishing to refer patients for care.

Fielding a call from an Oregon physician and having an available bed, I accepted a nine-year-old boy with abdominal pain. He arrived with his parents an hour later. Charlie (not his real name) was a beautiful, bright child wincing in pain whenever he moved or spoke loudly, and he seemed apologetic about reacting to pain. Healthy and always well, Charlie had begun having discomfort in the center of his abdomen a few hours earlier. He had become slightly nauseated as the discomfort became steady pain that seemed to be more on the right side of "my stomach." His temperature was normal, and the white blood cell count slightly elevated. He was one of those many patients referred to surgeons requiring careful evaluation of his history, all

other factors and especially the physical exam of the abdomen.

The Physical Examination of the Surgical Patient by Dunphy and Botsford, 1953, was considered by many to be the best published teaching of this important examination. My mentor and the Chairman of the Oregon Department of Surgery was Professor J. Englebert Dunphy. We residents were in awe of this fine gentleman, an unforgettable teacher as well as an excellent operating surgeon and one of the world's acknowledged surgical leaders. We all had watched Dr. Dunphy as he demonstrated his examination techniques. His approach, the way he spoke, then moved his hands, used his fingers and his percussion of the abdomen's regions were etched in our minds. We memorized many of his writings.

As I leaned over to get down to his level, I spoke softly and gently to Charlie. I asked, "Do you have a dog?" This opened the door. We spoke a little. I began questioning him about the onset of his problem and sequence of events. I asked his parents about others in the family, Charlie's schoolmates, and about their impressions of his illness. I examined Charlie's upper body and then focused on the abdomen.

I asked him to try to suck it in, then to blow out his "belly, like a cat's back." He had trouble doing that. I then laid

my hand gently on it, which he accepted. Probing a little more deeply, using a tapping "percussion" technique, I found slightly more tenderness in the center of the right side of the abdomen. I told Charlie and his parents that I thought he probably had appendicitis, but I wasn't certain and that he should be observed and re-examined over the next hours, likely overnight. They agreed with this plan, as later did the staff surgeon.

Enter the INTERN: Bruce had graduated from Baylor Medical School about a month earlier. Bright, hard-working, eager, and young, he was well-groomed and polite and knew everything he should know about all the patients under his care. He was a senior resident's delight. That is, until he was a "pain!"

Bruce approached me an hour or more after we had decided what to do with Charlie. My intern agreed with my findings and plan to observe the boy, but said that he thought we should check him for porphyria! I thought, "Oh, my God, what a pain! This is a rare disease we all have read about and never see." (One of the types of porphyria produces intermittent abdominal pain difficult to differentiate from other causes.)

I told Bruce that I was pretty certain Charlie was developing a full-blown picture of appendicitis, but there was no reason I could think of that he

shouldn't be screened for porphyria, although I had never done it. I put Bruce in charge of the project.

Bruce had Charlie urinate in a basin and then put the basin in direct sunlight in the boy's room. Later I was called in to view the basin. Charlie's urine had turned red. He had porphyria and had escaped a surgeon's scalpel.

I do not know what field of medicine Bruce ended up in or how his career progressed after he completed his pediatric surgery rotation. I only know I shall be forever in his debt and an admirer.

N.B. *The reader may wish to check out a DVD of the film about England's King George III, "The Madness of King George". Perhaps porphyria had something to do with the sequence of events that led to "The Shot Heard Round the World" at the Concord Bridge.*

Gardens are not made by singing
"Oh, how beautiful," and sitting in
the shade.

Rudyard Kipling

SWORD

by David Cuff

Fired in loyalty
Buckled on shield
Rushing toward foe
Sworn not to yield

Clanking on steel
Bloodied by wound
Slipping from grasp
Heavy to ground

STONE FARM: THE BACKSTORY

by Anne Baber

I remember sitting on the floor in front of the big radio in our living room and hearing, "Hen-REE! Henry Aldrich." And the answer, "Coming, Mother," in a high-pitched, put-upon voice.

I'm amazed, 70-plus years later, to be living across the road from his farm. For 15 years, Ezra Stone, our neighbor at Stone Meadows Farm, played Henry. I, and probably most of the listeners, envisioned Henry as a skinny, gawky, All-American boy-next-door. Actually, Ezra was a dark-eyed Jewish guy who by 1952 (when he quit the role) had matured into a fat little man in a vest who smoked cigars.

Ezra began his career young, making his debut on the radio at

age seven reciting “The Raven.” He received a diploma from the American Academy of Dramatic Arts in New York in 1935. His acting career took off. In only a couple of years, he got the lead role in “What a Life,” and the character Henry Aldrich was born. He went from the Broadway play to the spinoff weekly radio show in 1939.

He and his wife, actress Sara Seegar, met while the two were performing in “Horse Fever” on Broadway in 1940. They married in 1942 and bought the farm shortly thereafter. They named it Stone for Finestone, Ezra’s father’s name, and Meadows, for Ezra’s mother’s maiden name.

During WWII, Ezra was a producer, director and actor with the Army’s Special Services.

Later, the Stones commuted to Hollywood and New York, but also worked at the Bucks County Playhouse and Lambertville Music Circus over many summers.

Stone Meadows was not only a successful dairy farm, featuring award-winning Ayrshire cows, but also an attractive destination for the Stones’ glamorous friends from the worlds of theater and television. Some of the luminaries who drove up the long lane to the farmhouse were Martha Raye, Red Buttons, Burl Ives,

Debbie Reynolds, Jackie Cooper, Paul Lynde, and Uta Hagen.

Sara, who had begun her career on the London stage, was one of the “Pick-a-Little, Talk-a-Little” ladies in the 1962 movie “The Music Man.”

By 1969, Ezra was estimated to have directed 300-400 television programs.

On his retirement in 1979, he became director and president of the David Library of the American Revolution in Washington Crossing, PA, which was founded by his father Solomon Feinstone.

Ezra’s daughter, Francine, and her sister-in-law, Joyce Stone, are the current owners of Stone Meadows Farm. It consists of 166 acres of farmland (the last farm of this size in southern Bucks County), a creek and wetlands, two farmhouses, barns and several outbuildings. The Metropolitan Group has agreed to buy the farm, conditional on presenting a development plan that is acceptable to the Middletown Township Supervisors. Many groups are opposing this sale, including Pennswood Village, Newtown Friends School and George School.

My garden is my most beautiful masterpiece.

Claude Monet

MY PART IN THE FAMOUS SELMA MARCH

by Fred Solomon

On March 21, 1965, a gigantic march from Selma to Montgomery, Alabama, to petition for African-American voting rights was to change the course of history, for it inspired Lyndon Johnson's successful struggle to pass the monumental Voting Rights Act of 1965.

Two weeks before that famous march, there was an earlier attempt to march from Selma. It had turned out to be a horribly violent spectacle, a spectacle televised for the whole world to see. The marchers, including many children, were beaten and gassed by state troopers on horseback. That day became known as "Bloody Sunday."

"Bloody Sunday" quickly activated 10,000 outraged protesters to descend on Selma from all over America and Europe. Even though they worried about their safety, they were determined to take part in the second attempt to march to Montgomery, scheduled for March 21.

Also gathered in Selma for the big march were 100 of my colleagues from our Medical Committee for Human Rights (MCHR). I helped form this group of American healthcare professionals in June 1964

to provide medical care for civil rights workers, community activists and volunteers working in Mississippi during the "Freedom Summer" project.

They were heartsick to realize that there was still no arrangement for medical care, or even basic protection along the marchers' route—a route that passed through unsafe wooded terrain.

Up north in Washington, I had been left in charge of MCHR's national office, consisting of my office telephone. Fighting against the clock, I kept phoning officials of the Justice Department, as well as the White House itself, pleading with them to mobilize our military forces and telling them of our safety concerns for the thousands of international marchers walking through likely sniper territory. The situation was indeed dire: both my colleagues' pleas in Selma and my own were falling on deaf ears. It appeared that the notoriously racist governor of Alabama, George Wallace, was preventing the Feds from acting. He was unwilling to protect the protesters himself, but he also seemed to be warding off President Johnson's intervention with a battle cry of "states' rights." As the weekend approached, Governor Wallace seemed to be setting the stage for a massacre.

Suddenly, on Thursday, March 18, only three days before the second march was to begin, I got a break! An ally at the Justice Department gave me a valuable tip based on his work with politicians. It went something like this: “Don’t just tell Wallace about your concerns; tell him about his expenses. Tell him about all the professional supplies, vehicles, and manpower it would take to limit his liability.”

On that lawyer’s advice, we went ahead and developed a list of minimum requirements for the state of Alabama to meet the health and safety needs of the demonstrators. Although we had little reason to expect this to have an effect, it only took us an hour to create a daunting list of demands to be put into a telegram to Governor Wallace. Our staff in Selma decided that the demand list should be signed by a northern professor of medicine, rather than by one of the physicians down there. So, because I was a professor of medicine at Howard University, I ended up with the honor of being the sole signatory on our historic telegram to Governor Wallace!

“My” telegram was delivered on the next day, Friday the 19th, at 10 a.m. That same evening, the usual TV newscast was preempted in Alabama. The governor was going to address a special session of the combined houses of the state legislature.

Wallace gave an astonishing performance. He began by reading sections of the telegram aloud in an outraged voice: “SIX equipped ambulances!” “TWO mobile aid stations!” “NINE 300-gallon water trailers!” He then interrupted himself: “My staff estimates that all of this will cost Alabama at least \$300,000! And I don’t think that the taxpayers of Alabama should have to pay for this. I say, make the federal government foot the bill!”

The Alabama legislature then voted overwhelmingly to authorize federal assistance to the Selma marchers.

The next day, Saturday, March 20, President Johnson spoke in a nationwide broadcast announcing his plans to immediately activate the Alabama National Guard, supervised by regular army units from several parts of the United States. These would provide support to the marchers and suppress any violence directed at them. This plan was put into effect by that very night, immediately preceding the Sunday march.

What a relief! For my MCHR friends in Selma the sudden transition from no support to an abundance of emergency vehicles, helicopters, aid stations, etc. (as shown in the movie “Selma”) was simply extraordinary. How I wish I could have been there to experience Dr. Martin Luther King

safely leading the crowd eventually swollen to 25,000 of determined people on their four-day march into history!

But I have to admit to having felt a thrill when I as told that, as the first army helicopters flew over the marchers, my comrades let out a cheer: “There go Fred’s helicopters!”

Editors’ Note: Fred Solomon, a resident of Pennswood, died Nov. 26, 2017.

I used to visit and revisit it a dozen times a day, and stand in deep contemplation over my vegetable progeny with a love that nobody could share or conceive of who had never taken part in the process of creation.

Nathaniel Hawthorne

PAINT CHIP SONNET

by Gini Smith

Have you held hands with
Winter Calm,*
Skipped through Drizzling Mist,
Inhaled Blizzard Fog,
Or tasted Vanilla Frost?

Have you shoveled Wisteria Snow,
Dashed from a Tsunami Sky,
Donned a Snow Cap,
Or sailed an Ocean Storm?

Is thee Caught in the Rain,
Whistling through a Frosty Glade,
Tiptoeing on Thin Ice,
Or reflecting off Wet Pavement?

Here’s to doffing thy Raspberry
Beret,
And basking in the Mellow Spring,
the Filtered Shade.

(*Names of paint chips at a hardware store nearby.)

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