

# IMAGES, IDEAS, and REFLECTIONS

*Periodical Letter #20*  
*July 2021*

*from*  
**FREEMAN PATTERSON**



*An early rhododendron and forget-me-nots in my garden this year*

A 90-year-old friend of mine never talks about yesterday. She's always forging ahead. As much as I like to keep her example in mind, in this letter I'd like to tell you about the month that has just past, the culmination of a glorious and attenuated spring.

Where I live at Shamper's Bluff, New Brunswick, Canada, which is near the 46<sup>th</sup> parallel north, during the month of June it's broad daylight by 5:15 a.m. (Atlantic Daylight Time.) Although I probably don't need an alarm clock, I set one for 4:30, so I can be up, "coffeed," and ready to photograph right away. Almost without fail, it seems that the next hour or so, which is filled with birdsong, is the most beautiful time of the entire day.

On clear days I may be on my front deck within 15 minutes to watch the sunrise hues spreading across the broad expanse of river below me, usually a palette more delicate, restrained, and calming than the frequently dramatic oranges, reds, and magentas that precede and follow the sun's disappearance behind the distant hills sixteen hours later. On other clear mornings mist streams around the river islands, often forming rolling banks of pink, pale gold, and white that contrast with the reflected blue of the sky. But, some mornings the mists intensify and roll up the hill, enshrouding me for a few minutes or even a few hours before the long rays of the sun stream through to spotlight a rhododendron, a sweep of lupins, or a lone spruce in a broad meadow. I want to be present to receive these natural gifts. They are pure grace to me.

In addition, although the exact dates differ from year to year, June always brings the peak bloom of my rhododendron and azalea garden, a flowering that begins around the last week of April and, after the grand parade in June, continues more quietly until about the first week of August. This year the parade marshals pulled out all the stops! Woody Allen once remarked that he had always dreamed of playing a grand piano in a marching band. Well, this year my garden was like that at peak – grand pianos and marching bands all together in a great cacophony of hues and tones and fragrances. It was a feast for the senses.

So, I have decided to tell you the story of why the garden began, how it grew, and how it is still expanding. However, as you may suspect, the real story is about what's behind the visible expression. On the one hand, the garden is a thing-in-itself, but on the other it's a powerful symbol. Like so many things in your life and mine, it also stands for something else.

Most of my photographs are in the two hyperlinks, [BUILDING THE GARDEN](#) and [THE GARDEN 2021](#); all of them are of this year's bloom. Click on the hyperlinks once you've read the rest of what I'm writing about the garden. (If you're simply not interested in gardens and symbols, a good alternative might be one of Donna Leon's gripping Brunetti mysteries.)



In the preface to my book The Garden (Key Porter Books 2003), I wrote:

“Every garden and every gardener is a work in progress. No matter how tiny or grand, how colourful or restrained, how wild or ordered, the garden is a metaphor for the gardener. When you invite somebody into your garden, you are inviting them to meet you.

Although our garden may be like a “persona,” a facet of our personality that we want the world to see, more likely it is the face that we as gardeners want to show ourselves. So, when we observe and contemplate our creation carefully, we can learn a great deal both about who we are and who we want to be.

... Because every garden is a place of dreams and every gardener a dreamer, we should find nothing strange and much that is symbolic in our own and other gardens. Are the paths straight, or do they curve and wander? What colours appear consistently? Does the gardener worry about ripping out every last weed?

When we want to learn something important about ourselves, it’s a good idea to go into our garden. We’ll find that we’ve planted a lot of answers there.”

I also wrote in the preface:

“I am forever gardening in my imagination. Have you ever met a gardener who isn’t? I don’t mean creating scenarios that we would like to reproduce in the physical world, but gardens we can never create and probably nobody else could either – even if our financial resources were unlimited and our patience endless. But, perhaps we will draw or paint our imaginary gardens or, in my case, create them as photographs.”

Because I have learned that the symbols in our art (gardens and photographs, for example) frequently parallel the symbols in our dreams, both being expressions of our unconscious, I spend time endeavouring to recognize and to understand the symbols that appear in both. You may call it self-analysis, if you like, and it can be extremely useful as long as you endeavour to be objective and honest about what you discover. All of this is based on the assumption that you are making pictures or creating gardens for yourself, not trying to please somebody else.

Many of you have heard me talk about wanting to create a beautiful garden as a child, but being actively discouraged by my father, who wanted me to help him grow vegetables. He saw beauty only in plants that could be consumed as food or possibly made into clothing or some sort of tool. I cannot begin to estimate how many hectares/acres of beets, carrots, potatoes, and other vegetables I helped to plant, cultivate, and harvest as a child and adolescent. The positive aspects were that I learned a great deal about gardening and that I “survived emotionally” by observing the structure of spiders’ webs and the patterns on the backs of lady bugs and potato beetles, which fed my aesthetic impulse.

After I had completely recovered from my two liver transplants in January 2000, which took about five years, I recognized and grasped my opportunity – a person is never too old to have a happy childhood. So, I began by planting a couple of rhododendrons and three azaleas, a garden that has gradually expanded to around 1700 plants (1100 rhododendrons, 600 azaleas) in open woodland settings. Talk about a symbol!



## SEEING GARDENS

In 1988 I had the great privilege of photographing 38 of Canada's finest private gardens for Penguin's book, In A Canadian Garden. The authors, Nicole Eaton and Hilary Weston, had visited 300 gardens and with the editor, David Kilgour, had narrowed the number down to 100 for the book when I was invited to join the team. Then the four of us jointly made the final tough choices.

Before I began my work, which involved several flights back and forth across Canada between mid-winter and late autumn, David said to me, "Remember, this is a book about gardens. It is not a book about flowers." I knew instinctively what he meant. Some close-ups and macro images would be used as accents in the layouts, but the overall design of each garden should be fully apparent. I realize far more clearly now than I did then just how much the design of a garden reveals about the gardener and this year-long assignment was a great learning experience for me.

I began in February in Barbara Frum's garden in the Don Valley ravine, practically freezing my fingers to the bone, until Barbara and her daughter Linda (later appointed to the senate by Prime Minister Harper) spotted my agony, called me to the door where each rubbed one of my hands vigorously, then took me inside for coffee and munchies. The morning ended with Barbara showing me her collection of African miniatures, which had enormous appeal for me, and then the CBC driver picked us both up, delivering Barbara to her television studio and me to my next garden – an indoor one in the centre of Toronto with a three-storey-high rock waterfall. (This garden was one of three that was eliminated from the final book selection, which featured 35 gardens after I had submitted all my photographs. It had an "I'm trying to impress you" feeling about it that my images couldn't disguise.)

In about half the gardens I had the opportunity to have good conversations with the creator of the garden and, not surprisingly I realize now, my favourite gardens were almost always (though not always) those where the gardener and I developed a personal connection. The warmer, more open the gardener, the more likely I was to relate to the gardener's art.

It was this assignment that made me realize that "When you are inviting somebody into your garden, you are inviting them to meet you."



## BOOKS

Since I mailed my last letter to you, several people have written recommending books that they feel might interest other subscribers, so I'm in the happy position of having a library of recommendations from which to choose.

As I perused these books myself, I was reminded once again of how delving into a good book can keep us "connected" in ways vastly more important than texting or Twitter ever can. Passing snippets of information along quickly and frequently to friends and others and often receiving one-word replies, such as "awesome" or "whatever" or just part of a sentence, can be called "keeping in touch" only in the most superficial sense. Constant snacking makes us forget the deep satisfaction and enjoyment of sharing a good meal.

Unless plot matters, as in a novel or a mystery, often when I settle down with a book, I read only a couple of paragraphs or pages, then fold up the book in my lap, lean back in my chair, and simply reflect on what I've read. This "soaking in" of content frequently produces long moments of reflection, introspection, and self-analysis that invariably seem to arouse my creative urges. Far more often than not, by the time I rise from my chair, I am a considerably re-charged battery.

Two of the books I'm recommending are presented mostly in the form of relatively short paragraphs, each containing a main point or thrust. Thankfully, I bought both books as paperbacks, so I have no hesitation in highlighting sentences, marking one, two, or three stars in the margins, and listing pages of special significance for me on the inside back cover. (Sometimes I'll buy a book in paperback form after I've read it on my Kindle, simply so I can mark it up for easy referencing.)

A Mystical Path Less Travelled is by Jerry Wright, whose first book, Re-imagining God and Religion, I wrote about two years ago. Wright's second book is a ground-breaking, fearless, and frank continuation of the first. If you are one of the several persons who wrote to me about my brief theological reflections in my previous letter, this book is definitely for you, as well as for everybody else who is endeavouring to walk a meaningful spiritual path with an open mind and an open heart. Jerry Wright is a good friend of Margery Nea, a key resource person in the INSCAPE workshops that David Maginley and I facilitate. We hope Jerry will be able to join us for a future workshop.

The Art Spirit by famed artist and teacher Robert Henri was first published in 1923 and is every bit as relevant today as it was then. Henri's timeless work was drawn to my attention by Christophe Potworowski, a theologian, teacher of theology, and avid photographer. There are important parallels between the two books. Both authors are speaking to "the soul," the deep part of us that craves meaning in our lives. Although they have different starting points and may seem to speak in different languages, they would understand each other perfectly.

Finding the Mother Tree by Suzanne Simard is my third recommendation. Four persons wrote to me about this book and then David Corkett (a prolific reader) sent me this link about the upcoming film: <https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/british-columbia/amy-adams-ubc-forest-researcher-movie-1.6032379>.

The Amazon description of the book begins: *"Suzanne Simard is a pioneer on the frontier of plant communication and intelligence; she's been compared to Rachel Carson, hailed as a scientist who conveys complex, technical ideas in a way that is dazzling and*

*profound. Her work has influenced filmmakers (the Tree of Souls in James Cameron’s Avatar) and her TED talks have been viewed by more than 10 million people worldwide.*

*... Simard brings us into her world, the intimate world of the trees, in which she brilliantly illuminates the fascinating and vital truths—that trees are not simply the source of timber or pulp but are a complicated, interdependent circle of life; that forests are social, cooperative creatures connected through underground networks by which trees communicate their vitality and vulnerabilities with communal lives not that different from our own.”*



**“Reading is to the mind what exercise is to the body”**

*Joseph Addison*

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**This cathedral-like image of an open book, which I also included in issue #6 of “Images, Ideas, and Reflections” is by Robert Stahl, Seattle. Bob is a keen observer of what’s around him, even in the most seemingly mundane situations, and knows in his very bones what John O’Donohue called “the invisible embrace” of beauty.**

## SNIPPETS

As I write this, the news is filled with accounts of discovering the graves at Canada's former residential schools for our indigenous people. However, it's really a discovery only for non-indigenous Canadians. In the midst of these revelations a Catholic friend sent me the following link about the Doctrine of Discovery:

[https://sistersofcharityfederation.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/06/The-UN-and-You\\_June2021\\_final.pdf](https://sistersofcharityfederation.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/06/The-UN-and-You_June2021_final.pdf)

Here's the first paragraph of this highly informative article. "The papal bulls of the 15th century gave Christian explorers the right to claim lands they 'discovered' and lay claim to those lands for Christian monarchs. The underlying clause for 'discovery' was that any land that was not inhabited by Christians could be claimed and exploited. If the pagan people were willing to be converted, they were spared; if not, they could be enslaved or killed."

I've added the entire article to my permanent files.

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A quarter of a century ago I stopped mowing grass and having a lawn around my house. Instead I mow meandering paths through the grass, ferns, and myriad flowering plants. The change from the boredom of a lawn to the magnificent diversity of a meadow began almost immediately and has given me and many others such pleasure that I now have more than a kilometre of connected paths that lead to nowhere in particular. They are an invitation to wander all morning or afternoon from early spring until late autumn – with a camera or without – and know that you'll never be bored.

Of course, having meadows brings hosts of pollinating insects and a big increase in the bird population. Clouds of goldfinch rise before me at times, especially in late summer after they have finished nesting, and the threatened bob-o-link thrives, because its nests are never destroyed by cutting the grass. (The fields are mowed once – in September or October – and the vegetation is simply left to rot and become useful organic matter for future generations.)

Personally, I find that setting out on one of these paths immediately stimulates my desire to explore and makes me feel like a child again. It's a beautiful feeling and the perfect antidote for having had to sit too long at a computer.

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Although I'm not a fan of stand-up comedy in general, usually finding the non-stop banter either too forced or just plain irrelevant, I went off last night to Dunham's Run, the nearby winery, to hear James Mullinger again, a local and decidedly international comedian, who performs there from time to time and greatly prefers it to big-city venues.

James, an extremely bright, creative, and energetic guy, is also successful as a magazine publisher (print and digital) and a producer of podcasts for Bell cable TV, the rights of which soon revert to his magazine enterprise. Recently, I had the good fortune to work with James (and a video crew of six) on a podcast here on Shamper's Bluff, which provided me with the opportunity to know him better.

In that project as well as when watching and listening to James performing live, I am always aware of his easy professionalism. He's a firm believer in the adage that anything

worth doing is worth doing well, which means preparation and practise, practise, practise. However, last night he made it clear that a considerable amount of his material was new and he'd come with notes to which he'd be referring from time to time. In other words, we were going to participate with him in the process of getting it to polished form.

For all James' successes at a relatively young age, his willingness to expose himself to our possible criticism shows a man who has "inflation" under control. His ego hasn't run away with itself. And, it's always a pleasure to watch James meeting new people and greeting old friends; he draws strength from all the people he meets.

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Although I had to cancel my first workshop this summer because not quite enough people in New Brunswick had received their first Covid-19 vaccination (a number reached three days later,) I'm hoping that the August, September, and October workshops will go ahead. – even if some registrants from outside Canada may not be able to attend. If so, people on the waiting lists will fill the spots in most cases.

I have to admit that the refusal of some people to be vaccinated on the grounds of personal freedom bothers me tremendously. In exercising their freedom of choice, they are taking away other people's freedom. For example, my having to cancel the July workshop meant several people lost the instruction and entire learning experience and I lost the income. I've had no choice but to refuse unvaccinated people the opportunity of visiting my garden this year – for both health and legal reasons. The same applies to the workshops.

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**“Freedom and responsibility ... are the same thing. The more freedom we enjoy, the greater the responsibility we bear, toward others as well as ourselves.”**

*Interview published with the "Biograph" album set, 1985.*

**“A hero is someone who understands the responsibility that comes with freedom.”**

*Bob Dylan*

**“A person's rightful due is to be treated as an object of love, not as an object for use.”**

*Pope John Paul 11*

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*An early rhododendron meets an early primrose*

**Hartlike wense, ALMAL**

**Bons vœux chaleureux, TOUT LE MONDE**

**Warm good wishes, EVERYBODY!**

**FREEMAN**

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