

IMAGES, IDEAS, and REFLECTIONS

Periodical Letter #7
May 2019

from
FREEMAN PATTERSON



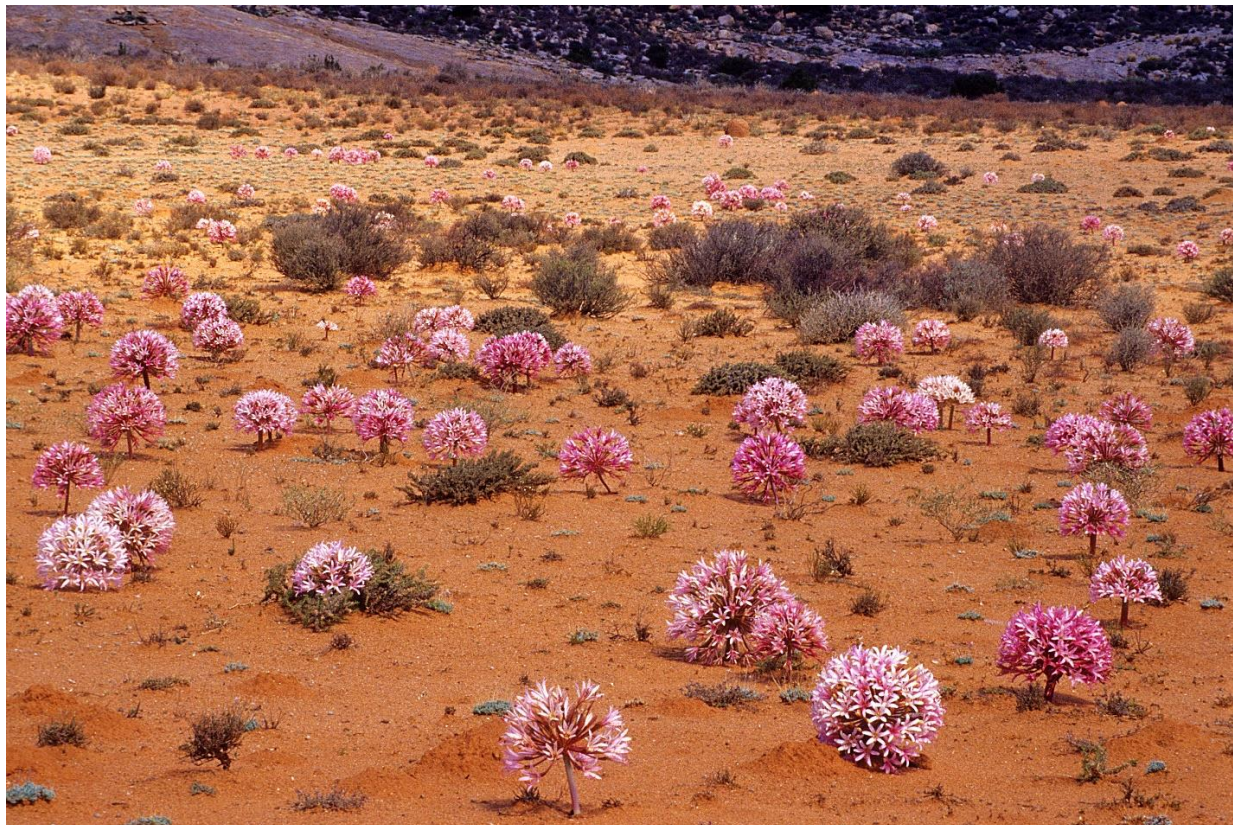
An evening in spring, Namaqualand, South Africa

Away back in 1989 I celebrated SPRING, my favourite season, five times – Mexico in late January and early February, Florida through South Carolina in March, New Brunswick in May and June, Namaqualand in northwestern South Africa in August and September, and New Zealand in November. I felt then and still feel that each spring, in its own way, was as lovely as all the others. Why? Because spring always gives me a huge emotional lift. It's as if all the goodness in the world is suddenly possible.

I'm deeply grateful that spring occurs at different times around the planet, as it's given me the opportunity to enjoy more than one spring a year, an opportunity I've frequently accepted and never more often than in Namaqualand, which I first visited in 1980 and where I taught spring photographic workshops from 1982 through 2006.

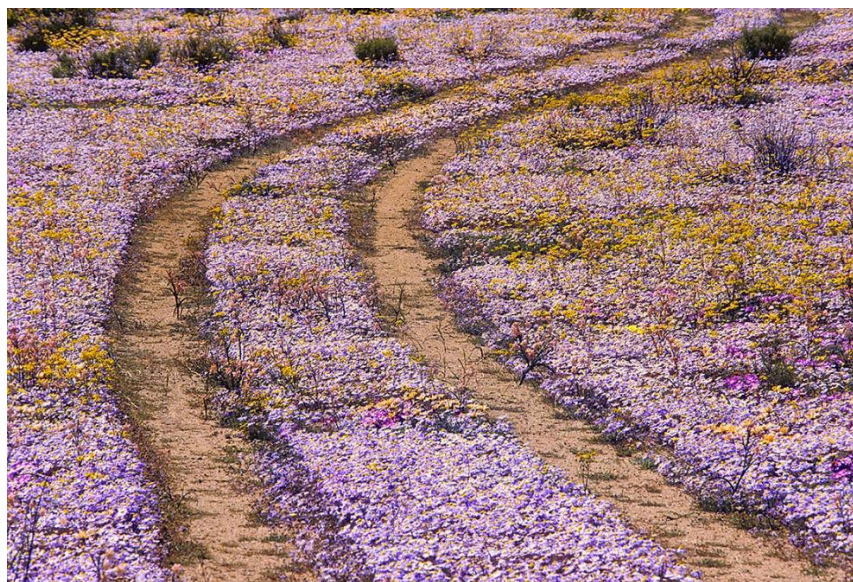
Namaqualand bursts forth nearly every spring (late July through mid September) in the world's most remarkable annual display of wild flowers. It's not just the sheer number and extent of the flowers that evokes awe, but also the number of species that are blooming more or less at the same time, even exceeding the variety in Western Australia's incredible displays, which I had the privilege of witnessing and photographing in 1998, a banner year. That year, my friend Roger Brownsey from Tokoroa, New Zealand, and I made it as far north of Perth as Payne's Find, where the flowers were so spectacular that we stayed at the truck stop there for six nights, sleeping in shipping containers on bed springs that had neither mattresses nor blankets. This was the only accommodation anywhere and we nearly froze to death every night, but the floral display in the surrounding 10 kilometres compensated for our suffering.

I have much better sleeping conditions in Namaqualand at the little Kamieskroon Hotel, which has become my second home. This year I spent two months there in February and March, my 41st extended stay. Although it's usually very dry at this time of year, if a good rain occurs March lilies (Brunsvigia spp.) may stretch across the veld, orange and red Haemanthus may appear in sheltered spots, and the graceful Crinum may be found in damp stream beds. All belong to the Amaryllis family.



March lilies, Brunsvigia, emerge in years when a good rain comes early, their leaves appearing after the blooms have finished.

The massive floral displays, however, occur in the spring, especially in August. Wise is the person who books a stay for two weeks or longer in order to leave the main north-south highway, the N7, to explore farm roads and unpaved secondary routes. You may see nothing special for a kilometre or five and then, as you clear a rise, a vast palette of colour stretches before you and you know you'll be there for hours.



“Implacable with age, Namaqualand sits in southern Africa facing the ocean and staring at the sun. Blistered, cracked, and wizened by years too numerous to count, its bronzed face reflects the harsh experience of an ancient settler who is long past being surprised by anything. But, when rain falls on its shrunk brow, streaming down weathered cracks and seeping into arid pores, the old mask dissolves into a thousand colours, and a new Namaqualand – vibrant with life and promise – lifts its countenance toward the sun.”

*From my 1984 book, **NAMAQUALAND: Garden of the Gods***



The authoritative guide to the wild flowers for both botanists and photographers alike is Annelise le Roux's Wild Flowers of NAMAQUALAND (www.randomstruik.co.za.) Annelise has an M.Sc. in botany and was in the employ of CapeNature for 38 years, focusing her research on the plants and conservation of Namaqualand. Also check the web site of Namaqua National Park, which begins across the highway from Kamieskroon and extends for approximately 50 km. to include a 60 km. stretch of the Atlantic coast. Click on [NAMAQUALAND FLOWERS](#) to view more of my photographs of Namaqualand in bloom.

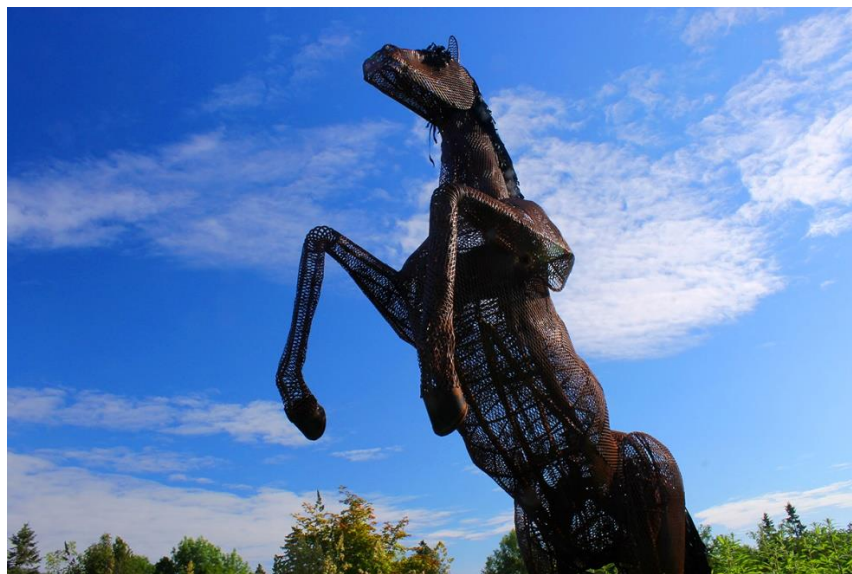
The flower is the poetry of reproduction. It is an example of the eternal seductiveness of life.

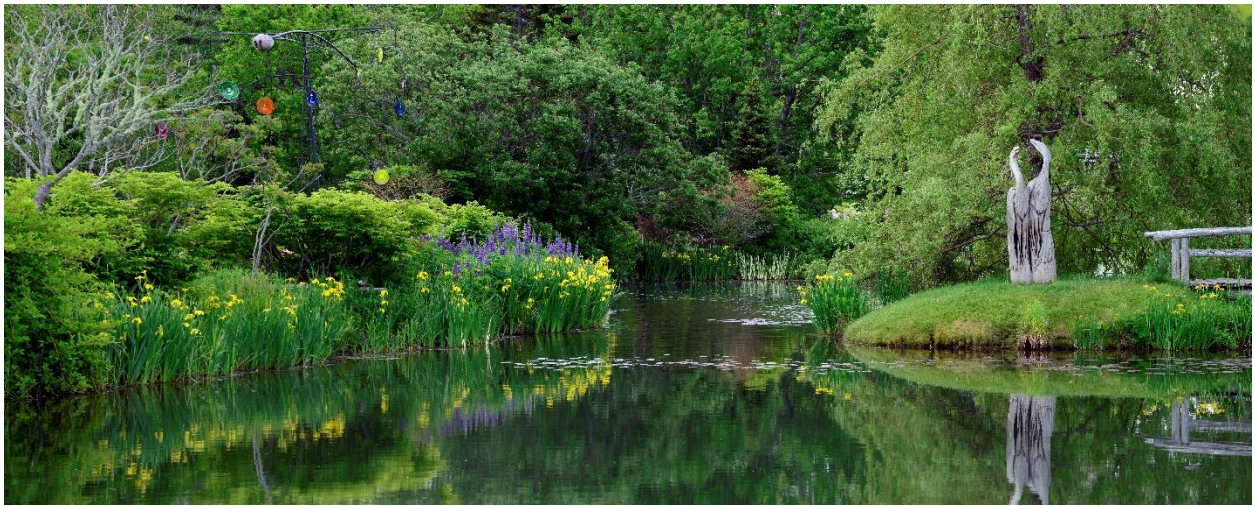
Jean Giraudoux

I must have flowers, always and always. *Claude Monet*

Of course, I look forward to visiting New Brunswick's **Kingsbrae Garden** more than once every year. It's in the Fundy coastal town of St. Andrews and is many gardens in one – 27 acres of flowers, grasses, shrubs, trees, ponds, sculptures, and paths that wander eventually to everywhere. Created by Lucinda Flemer, who spent the first 20 summers of her life at her grandparents' home there, Kingsbrae existed as Lucinda's dream before she made it her "labour of love." You may meet her there – somewhere.

André Gallant, my NB teaching partner, and I photographed the garden extensively over an entire season (May through October) for Lucinda and worked with Lucinda to produce her book **Kingsbrae**. You can see and read about the garden by visiting www.kingsbraegarden.com.







Photos from the book Kingsbrae; André and I deliberately did not identify who made each image (three here by each of us)..

Kingsbrae's "Garden Café" serves superb lunches, snacks, and beverages. The restaurant, "Savour in the Garden," is without surpass in the province for fine dining in an intimate setting and rates among the top in Canada. Chef Alex Haun uses mostly local ingredients and understands delicacy, understatement, and restraint. (I suggest you reserve well in advance.)

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

Rudyard Kipling
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In my second periodical letter, I expressed my conviction that one is never too old to have a happy childhood. For me, gardening (especially with flowers, ferns, trees, rocks, etc.) is like holding hands with Earth, as I did when I was a child. It's joyfully pursuing beauty simply because it matters. God knows, I've grown enough vegetables to feed an army for a year, but that's like feeding half the person, so now that it's spring in New Brunswick you can be certain that I'm out in my three-acre rhododendron-and-azalea woodland garden and cultivating what matters deeply to me.

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"Youth is happy because it has the capacity to see beauty. Anyone who keeps the ability will never grow old."

Frank Kafka
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Speaking of plants, one evening just before I left for Namaqualand in early February, I was listening to Paul Kennedy, host of CBC's superb radio program "Ideas," interviewing the botanist-author Michael Pollan. Pollan, who can range from erudite to hilarious, was talking about his exploration of plants with psychedelic-inducing properties. One thing in particular stayed with me from his remarks – that the same effects produced by ingesting non-addictive peyote/mescaline, for example, can be achieved through deep meditation. (Check out Pollan on YouTube, especially his keynote talk "Psychedelics and How to Change Your Mind" to the 2018 National Bioneers Conference.)

A month later, while I was reading Erich Neumann's The Origins and History of Consciousness, my Kindle popped up with the suggestion that I'd probably like Aldous Huxley's The Doors of Perception. Even though I'd long known about the book, I'd chosen not to read it, as I thought Huxley would simply be describing his experiences under the influence of mescaline. However, as Huxley's Heaven and Hell, somewhat a continuation written two years later, was part of the 99-cent bargain, how could I refuse?

I had totally underestimated Huxley, who was not only a great thinker, but also a superb writer (Brave New World, remember) and I found both these two "new" books "non-down-puttable." Among the many things I garnered from them was Huxley's full agreement with Pollan about deep meditation (also hypnosis) being an alternate method for opening "the doors of perception." (Remember that Huxley died in 1963 and Michael Pollan is very much alive.)

Quite frankly, Huxley could not have cared less about mind-altering drugs per se, rather he was profoundly interested in expanding consciousness. He came to regard psychedelics as what Catholic theologians call "gratuitous graces," gifts that are not essential to spiritual growth, but which, if available, should be gratefully acknowledged, not thoughtlessly dismissed or rejected. Huxley's concern, like Pollan's, was fundamentally a spiritual one. (Pollan can also speak in an informed way about the use of psychedelics in medical research, especially in the mental health field.)

In his talk to the Bioneers Pollan tells briefly of an evening spent in his garden after having ingested psilocybin/ "magic mushrooms" and the complete sense of one-ness he felt with all of nature. The vital point was not that he knew (and has long known) that he is as much an expression of nature as an ostrich or an ostrich fern, a granite rock face or a twisting flame, a fragrant breeze or a frog croaking in a malodorous swamp, but that he felt it utterly. It was not a concept, but revelatory.

I've never practised "formal" meditation, especially in a group, but when I'm alone in wilderness or my rhodo-and-azalea garden I can move quickly into the place that Pollan is describing. There is no separation for me, just one-ness. (It's a main reason that I don't carry a mobile phone. Actually, the sense of being present wherever I am is too real for me, too essential to be sacrificed.)

Do I need psychedelic assistance to be fully present in my garden? No, definitely not, but I'm not against it. Have I ever used cannabis or other non-addictive drugs? Of course! When I lived in Toronto in the late 1960s and early 70s, "grass" and "hash" were ubiquitous and I came to realize very quickly that cannabis is as likely to lead somebody to becoming a "druggie" as beer is to making somebody an alcoholic. Although some people should never touch cannabis and others should never touch Pepsi or Coke, most drug addiction begins with alcohol, which is legally available in most countries.

Cannabis became a legal product in all of Canada last October. What has always been easily available illegally is now available legally, which in my view is a far wiser policy than prohibition. And, whether you are a Catholic or not, you certainly don't have to be embarrassed about counting it among your gratuitous graces or acknowledging that psychedelics have both medical and spiritual value.

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There is no better high than discovery.

E. O. Wilson

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As always, my two months in Namaqualand, ending shortly after the two-week **wilderness camping tour**, were restorative, and I am anticipating next year. Already there have been enquiries about a tour. For reasons related to the Kamieskroon Hotel, the facilitators, it is seldom possible to decide before June about a tour for the following year. However, if there is to be one, the dates will be **March 8-22, 2020**. If you are interested, please keep checking my web site www.freemanpatterson.com. All other relevant information about the tour is always posted there. You may also write info@thekamieskroonhotel.com. This year participants (several repeaters) came from Australia, New Zealand, Zimbabwe, South Africa, the United States, and Canada. Excited, passionate, and caring, every single person co-operated willingly and fully with the camp crew and me. The result was a huge range of wilderness photographs (vast landscapes to close-ups), rich sharing over delicious meals, and a lot of laughter. Thank you all!



One evening near the Kamieskroon Hotel, early March 2019

I made the above image as a large JPEG on a \$450 camera (lens included). My reasons for mentioning this are simple: 1/ It's my long-term observation that most digital cameras have far too many functions and are far too complicated for the needs of most amateurs and, in fact, many professionals. 2/ In my view, always shooting RAW is a sheer waste of battery power, storage space, and processing time. Although some very well-known Canadians professional photographers agree, many amateurs seem shocked when I say this. When do I shoot RAW? Only when I feel there is some possibility that I will make a 20x30 or larger print, which is extremely rare. For me, the old K.I.S.S. principle still applies – keep it simple, stupid. Never let your equipment or the way you use it interfere with your spiritual life!

May you have a vibrant and joyous spring, whenever it comes! FREEMAN

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