

THE FRINGED GENTIAN™

A PUBLICATION OF FRIENDS OF THE WILD FLOWER GARDEN, INC.

Dear Friends,

Once again, I greet you in the waning days of winter as we anticipate the coming of that marvelous time, spring, a very special time at the Garden. Somehow, spring is thrilling year after year, even though we can estimate its timing and characteristics within a predictable range of days and degrees. Having lately spent more time in a moderate climate with much less annual variability, I have felt grateful for our Minnesota seasons, with their distinctive weather patterns, textures and colors. I believe this has attuned my senses to and enhanced my awareness of the power, diversity and beauty of the natural environment. Of course, our Garden could not exist anywhere else . . . and how fortunate we are that this place was chosen.

In mid-January, my favorite conservative, David Brooks, wrote a column in the *New York Times* titled “When Beauty Strikes,” in which he took sober stock of the contemporary focus on “post-humanist” cultural values such as metrics, analysis and materialism. He bemoaned the loss of a more aesthetic and meaningful emphasis on “the spiritual depths of emotion, symbol, myth and the inner life” that can elevate our experience of art and nature in a sustaining manner. He implied that we must be open to the opportunity for beauty because it “educates the emotions and connects us to the eternal.”

My mind went right to the Garden, a singularly powerful source of beauty in my life. And then I thought about the



The linnnet that Wordsworth refers to never strays to the Western Hemisphere, but its relative the house finch is an occasional visitor to the Garden, and it, too, has a beautiful song

founder and how her devotion to what she called the “Wild Botanic Garden” was rooted in a deep attachment to nature and creation, much akin to the sensibilities and writing of the English romantic poets of the nineteenth century. Her favorite among them was William Wordsworth, who believed that our notions of beauty begin with Nature (which he capitalized) and our “nativity” into this world. He posited a kind of developmental process of an increasingly abstract relationship to Nature from childhood to maturity. In this excerpt from “The Tables Turned” he warns his reader to beware of passive learning and a focus away from the natural world:

*Books! 'tis a dull and endless strife:
Come, hear the woodland linnet,
How sweet his music! On my life,
There's more of wisdom in it.*

*And hark! How blithe the throstle sings!
He, too, is no mean preacher:
Come forth into the light of things,
Let Nature be your Teacher.*

*She has a world of ready wealth,
Our minds and hearts to bless—
Spontaneous wisdom breathed by health,
Truth breathed by cheerfulness.*

*One impulse from a vernal wood
May teach you more of man,
Of moral evil and of good,
Than all the sages can.*

This poem is the source of the quote over the Garden's front gate, for which there is a lovely Friends' remembrance. In 1990, the Friends funded the new front gate construction of stone and wood. When the time came to select the words to be placed over the gate, board member Betty Bryan recalled that many other phrases were put forth as a possible entrance sign. Then, Gardener Cary George spoke up and suggested the Wordsworth quote, recalling that Eloise was a Wordsworth fan and



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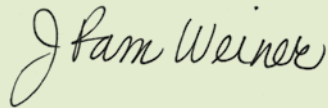
he thought this spoke to her belief system. It was agreed that this phrase was a wonderful way to express her founding intent and to welcome visitors in to learn and enjoy.

While the poem and its harsh dichotomy may seem quite outdated, there is something here that still speaks to us. Might our care and deep regard for the Garden be giving us back a special gift in return, keeping us in touch with the primacy of Nature and its beauty? I know many of us feel something like this. Could the Garden help us be better able to avoid the spiritual and/or

philosophical dead zone of reductionist tendencies that Brooks referred to? I think Wordsworth and Eloise would say yes to these questions and I quite agree.

In closing, I wish you a wonderful spring full of beauty and meaning, and I hope to see you at the Garden. To see photos and read more about Eloise, the Garden and the Friends, please visit our website: www.friendsofthewildflowergarden.org.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Sam Weiner". The signature is written in dark ink on a light green background.

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Dear Friends,

After a wonderful spring at the Garden, we have entered into the glorious season of summer, a time of growth and richness in the natural world. For many of us in modern urban life, it is also a time of recreation and ease, a time when we are free to be outside for hours being active and relaxed. We remember with gratitude, and more than a little amazement, that our foremothers and forefathers were not having our kind of summer; they were very busy tending crops and gardens, caring for livestock and maintaining their tools and equipment, working towards that critical goal of the bountiful autumn harvest from which their food and funds for the next year would come.

Across the world, midsummer and the solstice are still celebrated as the symbolic beginning of the fertile power of the earth, sustaining us and all our fellow living things here on our amazing planet.

At the Garden, summer's warm weather brings a fairly steady stream of visitors, many family groups and quite a few out-of-towners. It's a busy time in the Martha Crone Shelter, and our volunteers play an important role in welcoming everyone and orienting visitors to the Garden's many treasures. The naturalists conduct a wide variety of programs, and I encourage you to check out their offerings on the Minneapolis Park and Recreation Board's website. Go to www.minneapolisparcs.org/ebwg, and scroll down to the summer program brochure. There you'll find wildflower walks, tours geared to families, birding programs, nature hikes and much more. Most programs are free, but there are some special ones with fees. Program descriptions, schedules and all the information you need to sign up are provided.



One of several great-horned owlets that were spotted in the Garden this spring.

photo: Tammy Mercer

As you might imagine, prime growing season for wildflowers, tomatoes and herbs is also very kind to invasive plants. (Perhaps you have walked our city lakes and other green spaces and observed the huge swaths of buckthorn.) In and around the Garden we are winning many battles against invasives, but the war goes on. For our FIPAG (Friends Invasive Plant Action Group) volunteers, there is a summer lull between the spring campaign—focused mostly on garlic mustard—and the fall one targeting buckthorn. Co-chairs Jim Proctor and Liz Anderson are on the watch nonetheless, keeping track of key problem areas near the Garden and planning future pulls. In addition, they confer with MPRB staff, especially the Garden Curator and other local experts on methods and technique, tracking results from other projects in our region. The science on invasive species is fairly new, and ideas are in flux, even among experts, especially in light of today's complex climate change factors.

This summer we have the additional pleasure of using our new wetland boardwalk to stroll along in search of plants, birds and beautiful dragonflies. After my Sunday afternoon shift in late May, I rested on the bridge bench, admiring the yellow flag iris and the leaves and buds of the showy lady's slipper, preparing to bloom in a couple of weeks. I thought about the next stage of the boardwalk, for which we will start to fundraise later this season. It feels good to see what we've accomplished so far and know that we can eventually complete this essential and beautiful complement to the Garden.

In closing, I want to share some very good news. We are welcoming a special new arrival to the world of the Eloise Butler Wildflower Garden and Bird Sanctuary. Our Garden Curator, Susan Wilkins, and her husband, Casey Miller, are the proud parents of a precious spring baby. We send them our heartfelt congratulations and hope to see the little fellow at the Garden later this season.

Sincerely,

J Pam Weiner



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Dear Friends,

As I write on the first day of October, daytime temps are still in the high 60s and there is very little autumn color so far. The Garden is glowing green, and the warmth and our generous rainfall have created an extraordinary scene in the prairie, with very tall and robust plants towering overhead. The purple asters are huge and showing no signs of fall fading yet. Curator Susan Wilkins agrees that we are seeing something extraordinary, and she is tracking the plant communities carefully as we attempt to understand how the Garden will be affected by climate change.

One change we want to avoid is having parts of the Garden become a monoculture, where certain plants take over because conditions are favorable to them, threatening healthy species and limiting diversity. So the Friends have helped to fund some corrective measures to reduce invasives and aggressive woody plants in the wetland and prairie. In the near future, the Garden may lose some species and support others as conditions shift. Perhaps we will have some “new natives.” It is a challenging time for the Garden and the Curator, with many unknowns. I believe the Friends must be ready to support whatever programs and techniques are deemed appropriate and protective as we confront this complicated new era in the life of our unique and treasured Garden.

On a happier note, I want to share some very rewarding news regarding the wetland boardwalk. This year, the Minnesota chapter of the American Society of Landscape Architects (ASLA) gave the boardwalk its People’s Choice Award. Additionally, the project was a finalist for a 2016 Design Award at the national ASLA event (one of 30 finalists out of 456 entries). That jury commended the restraint and simplicity shown in the boardwalk design, especially in reference to its natural context. They also remarked on the use of wood milled from local ash trees, as well as the sensitivity of the preparation and installation given the vulnerable wetland habitat.

The Cuningham Firm, led by James Robin and David Motzenbecker, is to be congratulated for its excellent work reflected in these professional kudos. We should also commend Minneapolis Park

and Recreation Board staff, especially Susan Wilkins and Andrea Weber, past lead on planning, along with the community and Friends’ Board participants who served on the technical advisory committee. We can be confident in the success of Phase I, on both utilitarian and aesthetic grounds.

So, now, it’s time to get moving on the next phase of the boardwalk project. As you know if you’ve visited the wetland this season, there remains a significant area yet to boardwalk in the low-lying portion of the Garden. Fundraising plans are taking shape, and I ask that you consult our website (www.friendsofthewildflowergarden.org) over the winter for news of a special Mother’s Day event, as well as other updates. In 2017, the Garden will have a 110-year birthday and the Friends will reach 65 years of service, so those anniversaries will play a role in our efforts. I welcome your thoughts and suggestions about fundraising, too. Please contact me at drjpw@earthlink.net or 612-377-3572.

As another season comes to a close, allow me to thank all of our devoted volunteers, including those serving as docents in the Martha Crone Shelter, the wily weed warriors of our FIPAG teams, and the Legacy Stewards. Later in these pages, you’ll find photos from our Annual Volunteer Appreciation Event, where we honor the generous folks who do so much for the Garden.

I also want to welcome our new volunteer coordinator, Jennifer Dunne, who has been on the job for only six weeks and is already showing great mastery. Past volunteer coordinator Lauren Husting is still with us as a volunteer as she moves on to her doctoral studies at the University of Minnesota School of Music. Thank you, Lauren! Here’s another example of the truism that “it takes a village,” and here’s to all of you who help sustain the Garden with your memberships, donations and volunteering.

Sincerely,



photo: Melissa Hansen

