

The Friends of the Wild Flower Garden



Wildflower Garden Birthday Bash August 2007

By Nancy Vivian

Despite sweltering heat (and yes, humidity) children (of all ages) turned out in droves to celebrate the Eloise Butler Wildflower Garden Centennial. Guests were met by volunteer greeters who distributed booklets on the garden. They were filled with impressive botanical illustrations and pages of highly informative text describing the garden and its flora.

Eloise Butler "herself" was present to escort folks between events. She was remarkably well preserved for her age and her wit was fully intact. When she asked a rather cocky young boy his name and was told it was "Acorn Man," she shot back, "Glad to meet you Acorn Man, I'm Biology Woman."

Guests followed colorful cardboard birthday candles to the various performances by In the Heart of the Beast Puppet and Mask Theatre (HOTB) which included something for most everyone.



Pollen Nation (above) was a presentation which used song and dance to enact the amazing relationship between flowers and their pollinators. Music, composed by Laurie Witzkowskie and performed by Floral Chorale included a delightful song by kazoos and a wonderfully discordant song which engaged the audience in simultaneously imitating a number of birds. The real birds in the garden seemed to be both fleeing and approaching to see what the ruckus was all about.



While Eloise Sleeps was a lovely puppetry performance celebrating the life and work of EB. Children huddled close to the stage and watched in rapt attention despite the heat. The performance included some of EB's most quotable quotes including her statement to the effect that her mission in life was to teach people the value of "weeds." Especially memorable was her view that botany is a source of solace and mental health in modern life.

How Flowers Changed the World also entertained and delighted the many "friends" of Eloise Butler who came this day to celebrate. Another program highlight was Song of the Seasons. People filed in and jockeyed for seats in what shade could be found on the oak-dotted hill in the prairie. The performance included many fabulous creatures including dancing frogs and the Bogness Monster who cavorted to funky music by sax, drum and various other instruments. The audience seemed smitten as the Bogness did "the wave" and turned from pursuit of the frogs to pursuit of its own tail. Three timely messages came

through in the fun. We were told to “let nature be your teacher.” We were also reminded that not only is it not crazy to plant a garden you’ll never see grow to full maturity, it’s exactly what Eloise did and part of the reason we celebrate her work today. Finally, a colorful and much larger than life Eloise was surrounded by children and reminded us all to “stay together and learn from the flowers.”

The audience then dispersed and lined up for refreshments. Never was waiting in line so enjoyable. Children not too sophisticated to be children created flowered hats and modeled them proudly. A newly planted rain garden wafted the aroma of fresh cocoa bean mulch and Dreamland Faces serenaded with a series of lilting, upbeat and oompah-esque tunes by sax, tuba, banjo, singing saw, accordion and crooners. This fun was also interspersed with important messages. For example, the refrain of the Iraqi children’s song carried the timely message “I want to be a friend to you.” Eloise’s birthday cakes awaited at the end of the line and were bedecked with, not too surprisingly, colorful icing flowers.

All in all, it was a day of great joy, levity and learning in a garden oasis worth preserving and celebrating. And of course the garden is ours to enjoy because of the efforts of the remarkable Eloise Butler, whose achievements are worth celebrating and whose life is worth imitating.

