



Friends House Letter

Friends House
Seniors Association

April 2024

Nature... Residents share stories, poems, thoughts, art work and photographs.



Sally Eller working in the new native plant garden. Photo by Nancy Rea.

Happy Earth Month!

by Nancy Rea

“Earth Month is an exciting time at Friends House,” says Sally Eller, clerk of the Environment Committee. In some ways, it may be the biggest or at least the most active holiday at FH. As we emerge from the winter greyness, it is a time that pulls all residents together in appreciation of nature, and in concern about our role in protecting the planet.

For 2024’s celebration, the 50 members of the Environment Committee are actively promoting and incorporating the appreciation of nature or climate actions into as many activities as possible. Members are working with other committees and activities to give a tip of the hat to Mother Earth during April — whether it is the FH Newsletter’s theme of “Nature,” the Library Committee’s display, the Program Committee’s movies and live speakers, or groups having conversations about what we can do to make the Earth healthier.

The Environment Committee is active all year. In addition to staying up to date on national and worldwide earth health science advances, the best ecological practices, and climate politics, the Committee collaborates with the FH Retirement

Community’s administration in efforts to make FH an environmentally healthy campus, with plans to be a demonstration site for best practices.

Members have different levels of participation. Some are active on the listserv, sharing news about climate change and efforts to improve the environment. Others are involved in tasks organized by the various subcommittees, and some are deeply engaged in organizing the committees. Some of the Committee’s recent projects include:

- goose poop sweeping, which can add upper body work to your walking;
- creating a native plant garden at the entrance to the main building: The garden sleeps for the first year; in the second year, it should creep; and in the third year, it should leap!
- changing mowing practices, which revealed our lovely clover blooms; and
- submitting a grant application for a demonstration meadow: We hope this grant will help rebuild our ecosystem and protect the Anacostia River, as well as bringing some new partners onto the campus.



Photo by Carole Marks.

My Chance to Garden

by Carole Ulyett Marks

I am a birthright Quaker originally from Wallingford, Pennsylvania. Pendle Hill was one mile east of us, Providence Meeting was one mile north, and Media Friends Sunday School was one mile west of that.

My parents loved to garden on their quarter-acre property — growing fruits, vegetables, flowers, and herbs — an apple tree, two pear trees, currant and gooseberry bushes, rhubarb, and concord grapes along a fence. There were two compost piles; we added all our fall leaves and kitchen scraps. The soil was rich and black.

We ate stewed tomatoes every winter from our crop. Mom prepared currant gooseberry jams. We ate gooseberry pie sweetened with honey.

Mom tended peony bushes along the driveway, and red roses grew on trellises against the garage. Azaleas, bridal wreath, lily-of-the-valley, and irises bloomed each spring. Dad built a small lean-to shed at the back of the garage to store the gardening tools.

In 2009, I came to Friends House knowing I would have a chance to garden. I had a bed in ‘the back 40’ for a number of years. Today, I enjoy a raised table bed where I grow a few herbs and flowers. I tend some house plants started by Dipali Sinha; they bask on my window sill in Homes on Quaker Lane.

I am so grateful for all that my parents taught me about gardening, and for the chance to have my own garden to tend at Friends House.

Flow

by Elaine Yamada

Life is

Being Grounded,
And Present,
And seeing what is. Even as Life changes.

Flowing through life is

Trusting to the safe passages.
Diving deep to experience them.
Floating lazily down sunlit dappled waters.

All of us are

Shifting, changing — daily —
Weakening here, strengthening there.
And if we are lucky,
Always deepening —

Growing in Love,

Growing in Community.



Passage, 2023 Painting by Linda M. Davis.

Friends House Letter

A publication of Friends House Seniors Association

Convener: Kendall Anthony
Editorial: Marly Davidson, Ann Gerike,
Marty Hale, and Lydia Stone

Photography: Nancy Rea, Nancy Lark,
Bonnie Zimmer

Design & Layout: Liane Luini



Knockin' on Heaven's Door

by Libby Schleichert

Up close, I admire the black locust's trunk. It is elaborately furrowed as if carved by a master woodworker. The trunk is a tribute to the tree's longevity: Deeply etched dark, vertical grooves form only in the trunks of older locusts and are interspersed with ropelike "cords." This one boasts delicate strands of green lichen over much of its surface. Young locust trees have smooth trunks, light in color, untouched by lichens but, with age, the trunks darken and form the striking 3-D pattern. And this particular locust, which towers over the hill behind our house, is perhaps 40 years old.

Every morning, as I sip tea, I gaze out at this old giant — and it never fails to make me smile. From afar, the furrowed trunk isn't visible. What you see instead are its quirky branches silhouetted against the pale morning sky. And it seems these branches, unlike the trunk supporting them, refuse to "act their age." They exude a youthful, playful energy, twisting this way and that, heading down, then swooping left, then right, then looping up. While the arrangement of the tree's limbs might appear random in their craziness, they actually are so artfully arranged that the twirling, twisting branches balance each other out. A wild branch twisted out and up on one side is matched by a similarly contorted one opposite it — and those above and below make way for the quiriness of surrounding branches. It's all perfect in its choreography.

At the tree's very top, delicate twigs squiggle and squirm up, up, up, forming an airy dome — as if ecstatically flinging themselves toward the Infinite, or to quote Led Zeppelin, "knock, knock, knockin' on Heaven's door."

The locust tree bids us — we who sigh over our own age-induced wrinkles and furrows and who long ago ceased dancing — to quit being so fuddy-duddy-ish.

"Don't stop living! We're bound for glory!" it seems to shout out. "What about you?"

The Show-Off

by Nancy Rea

He saw me when I opened the back door to take his picture. Instead of running off, he looked right at me for several moments. Then he turned his head to show his profile. And, just in case I hadn't properly appreciated his beautiful rack, he lowered his head and moved it slowly to his side, giving me a view of the top, to be sure I had seen it from all angles. I assured him that I was impressed and watched as he wandered off after I shut the door.

One reason I like watching and photographing wildlife in my backyard is that I see the same animals repeatedly; they get used to me and accept me as part of the neighborhood. This means that I can pay attention to what they are doing, rather than just identifying what species I've seen. Whether they are engaged in courting behavior, nurturing their young, or squabbling at the food source, I enjoy seeing the personalities of my wild neighbors.



Photo by
Nancy Rea.

Ready for the Spring Parade

by Jim Hersey

Ephemerals, we call them, emerge to grab the sun — to leaf, and flower, and seed — before tree leaves above shade the forest floor along our Friends House woods.



First up, bloodroot (*Sanguinaria canadensis*), bold, white cantilevered petals; natives rubbed their red root juice on aching joints.

Next, spring beauty (*Claytonia virginica*), white flowers with pink stripes open on sunny days and close at night.



Star chickweed (*Stellaria pubera*), ten-pointed pedal segments sparkling like stars along the forest floor cheer our path.

Rue Anemone (*Thalictrum thalictroides*) or windflower, shows sweet white petals framed by three round-lobed leaves.



In contrast, Jack-in-the-pulpit (*Arisaema triphyllum*) delights with green alone. Its pointing hood gets brown stripes and clusters of red berries as it grows.

At last, the yellow trout lily (*Erythronium americanum*), pokes out. Her two faun spotted leaves remind one of brook trout. Her shy face peeps from yellow coif bonnet wings curled flirtingly back. The clever plant devised a sweet filled sheath to surround her seeds so ants carry them back to their nests for their larvae, and so scatter the seeds for the next growing season.



Enjoy.

Photos by Jim Hersey.

Nature and Technology

by Sally and Tim Eller

A big movement in technology is to bring nature closer to humans for observation and pleasure. Many of us enjoy the wildlife photos from Nancy Rea's trail cameras, and technology also brings us small cameras (cams)



for observing birds up close.

This Christmas, our son and grandchildren gave us a bird feeder with a camera mounted on it. This allows us to view the birds up close and listen to their sounds. The feeder is called Birdfy. Tim is unable to easily get to a window to see the feeders, but Birdfy allows him to see the birds feeding via a WiFi connection to my smart phone. We can also cast this action to our TV, and Tim can see the action at the feeder in a large mode.

We enjoy seeing many House Finches, Juncos, Cardinals, Blue Jays, Bluebirds, and a Red-Winged Blackbird! There is a built-in siren, which I can use to scare the Starlings away! This model is available from birdfy.com on the Internet. We are considering a nest box cam so that we can see Bluebirds nesting and hatching!

Are you wondering which bird is singing? You can download the free app for your smart phone — called Merlin Bird ID from the Cornell Lab of Ornithology — and it will give you the answer. <https://merlin.allaboutbirds.org/>

Or you could try the Haiku box, <https://haikubox.com/>, which is connected to the WiFi in your apartment or cottage. Ask Sharon Stout how that works for her!

We are enthusiastic about this technology, which can bring more of nature into the lives of those of us who can't easily get outside.



All the Gardens I Didn't Have

by Kendall Anthony

I grew up in Denver with a mother who was an avid and skilled gardener. I remember tomatoes just off the vine — and flowers, always flowers. Would I follow in her footsteps?

College in Iowa — the state that comprises 95% of the nation's Grade A farmland, according to the governor — was lots of study, no garden. Then off to grad school at the University of Chicago, and life on the 8th floor of a Hyde Park apartment. Next, to New York City and an apartment with one window on a dark courtyard. Not even enough sun for plants on the window sill.

A move to Tucson. I got married and we lived in a wonderful desert community. I loved the cactus, quail, road runners, and desert air. Not a place for a garden.

On to Laramie, Wyoming: 7200 feet and the possibility of snow in both June and September — a very short growing season. Nope, no garden.

Finally, a move to warm, wet Maryland. We lived in an apartment but — lo and behold — the county rented garden plots and I signed up! Seeds in the ground and green showing when ... they shut the hoses down! It was a dry summer. My 3-year-old daughter and I spent the summer hauling VERY LARGE HEAVY metal cans of water, which my husband would load in the car before going to work. No garden next year.

At last, a home of our own, with an acre and a half of woods. My mother visited to help with some shade plants. Two trowels in, and she said it was some of the worst soil she had ever seen. So ... we enjoyed the trees.

And finally to Friends House, with its wonderful soil and garden plots. But ... I realized I don't like working outside in the heat and humidity! So...I am grateful for farmers' markets, and Tom Farquhar who brings us produce for sale. And, most of all, I'm grateful for the residents who share their vegetables and flowers with me as I sit on my balcony.



A High-Five for Mother Nature!

by Nina Woolpert

Like many of the residents at Friends House, I was fascinated by Nancy Lark's exhibit in Flower Alley. One of her talents is the ability to create woodcarvings and other unusual artwork from a wide collection of local material. Who wasn't tempted to reach out and touch things?

Although I come from a family of avid nature lovers, we have entirely different favorites. My mother (our dedicated Girl Scout leader) loved giant driftwood because of its size and shape. On the other hand, Dad had a musical ear and was entranced with the calls of wild birds. Sunsets and rainbows made everyone happy, so there was always something for us to enjoy.

As for myself, I love nature's "accessories." When I was a little girl, my favorite things were the little pieces of outdoor stuff that would fit into my pockets: acorns, leaves, nuts, and magical shiny stones. Then came bigger treasures: pine cones, seed pods, thorny brown gum balls, feathers, shells, bark, moss, mushrooms, and pieces of wild grapevine.

My pockets always overflow with tiny, dusty, discarded objects! Thank you, Mother Nature.



I'm talking to YOU. Photo by Nancy Rea.

Women's Art Museum Trip 2-21-2024

Pat Kephart and Marly Davidson went on the Women's Art Museum trip sponsored by the Tour Committee and were impressed by the work of Patricia Tobacco Forrester, 1940-2011.



*Clearing, 1986,
watercolor on paper.*

Acclaimed for large-scale watercolors painted outdoors rather than in the studio, Forrester rendered scenery throughout the U.S., Europe, Central and South America, and the Caribbean.

“The accidental nature of watercolor—the fact that paint moves across the paper—is my partner in the work.”



Shenandoah Spring, 1993, watercolor on paper.

Three Poems

By Adele Dellavalle-Rauth

“Invitation”

I wandered into
A garden of leafy arms
calling me to rest.

“Breathe”

Life happens between
an inhale and an exhale
And the beat goes on.

“Finding Fullness”

Absent my own child,
I must cradle the Cosmos
That envelops me.

“Sabertooth & Congressman Klug”

by Nancy Sessions Edwards

This short short story is dedicated to my brilliant friend Nancy Rea.

Of all the creatures whelped on planet Earth by Mother Nature, the most memorable for me must surely be Sabertooth, the vegetarian, tee-totaling tigress.

I first met this most salient of beasts at Martha's Vineyard where she worked as a croupier at the Out-of-Luck Casino, a voracious hole-in-the-wall where countless fortunes — including Martha's — were blown.

Sabertooth was a minimally corrupt croupier-tigress who fraternized little with the island's other varmints and critters. As a result, she never got wind of the arrival from the mainland of Congressman Belchwasser Klug, the pugnaciously smug, tug-of-war slug-a-bed bugger from Scarcely Snug, Texas, where neverhug muggers and chug-a-lug skullduggery were uglier than elsewhere.

It was a balmy evening in mid-August when Congressman Klug waddled into the Out-of-Luck Casino where, as usual, Sabertooth was minding the roulette table while sipping from a large goblet of V-8 juice.

The congressman sidled up to Sabertooth and snarled, “How dare you swill Bloody Marys on the job?” Before Sabertooth could respond, Klug added, “I can see you're just another alcoholic liberal. You're not even worth a subpoena. I think I'll just have you locked up in the slammer at Jackson, Mississippi. The congressman from there is an ole poker buddy of mine. ...”

“But I'm a tee-totaling vegetarian,” protested Sabertooth.

“Stuff and nonsense!” cried Klug with contumely as he reached for his smart phone.

On what happened next, all witnesses agree.

Sabertooth, in an instant, scooped up the screeching and arm-waving Klug into his mouth, from which the prey prayed and shrieked amid hiccups, “But I am a graduate of Ancient Orangehair’s Academy of Mendacity.”

These, it turned out, were his last words. The final sighting of him comprised a pair of fatty lower legs which, before long, would tickle the duodenum of the ever so remorseful tigress from the Tigris, the laboring Sabertooth babe.



*Augustina, the lean
vegan tigress, for eons
had suffered fools
gladly until, with
egregious hostility,
falling afoul of a lone,
sanctimonious cretin;
it was then that two
gossamer threads in
her lower brain crossed
and engrossed all her
fervor in forcing the
fellow to dwell in her
cavernous belly, in
brief, to be eaten.
Illustration by Nancy
Edwards.*

From an Intro to a Set of Russian Animal Fables

by Lydia Stone

“In Defense of Animal Fables”

The night is full of calls and twitters:
The mongrel’s yelp, the owl’s moan.
This cacophony of unseen critters
Should cheer us, for we’re not alone.

Through paying heed to “lower” creatures,
The human soul we can explore.
You see, we share our drollest features
With lion, rhino, asp, and boar.

The author of these Russian fables
Wrote in another time and place,
Yet had a vision that enables
Us to know the human race.

The beasts who prowl through his collection —
Echidna, pumas, sparrows, sheep —
Can tell us much in this connection,
For human nature’s but skin deep.



Virginia creeper. Watercolor and color pencil by Clare Margiotta.

The Dance of Spring

by Patricia Mahone

For weeks now the anticipation has hung in the air.
Since windows were opened to the first warm breezes.
Breezes that previewed its coming.
Breezes that swept clear the staleness of months indoors.
Flocks of birds, formation of geese returning to northern habitats.
Tips of green and white, pushing thru hard brown earth.
Yellow-green hues on tree and bush hinting of growth to come.
The crocus, like trumpets of vibrant purple and gold, heralding the day.
Red Breast, first one, now two, now more.
It's coming soon. It is imminent.

All of nature about to explode into new growth, color, warmth, fragrance, activity.
Fields to be cleared, trees to prune, seeds to be planted, loves to be reborn.
Yet the chill remains. All is not quite ready.
The moment is still awaited.
All of nature strains forth. The chill holds it back.
Last minute touches still needed.
When will it come, my spirit cries out.
It is happening, it replies.
Be slow, be patient, be gentle.
It comes and it already is.



Photo by Nancy Rea.

Nature is My Canvas



A Solo Exhibition in Wood and Photography by Nancy Eynon Lark

Flower Alley

February 23 – April 5, 2024

A personal exploration of beauty in nature and the power it has to heal, to teach, to inspire, and to drive us to express ourselves in ways that go beyond words.

Art and Nature: as interrelated as breathing in...and out...



Fallen Leaves

Wasted Space