

Beverly's Garden

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A reoccurring art class exercise in elementary school and junior high was to sketch outdoor scenes or subjects of the student's choosing when weather permitted. I seemed to regularly find small areas and become obsessed with depicting all of the rich detail as accurately as possible. Something about the endless abundance of information even at the smallest scale appeared fascinating. Selecting a spot smaller than a square foot, with an apparently compelling arrangement of elements, I would try

occasional ant. It was a universe of its own, to which I was irrelevant and alien, and it seemed that a connection with it could only be found through the total acceptance and embrace of its presence in exacting detail. At every imaginable scale is the same busy activity, accelerating time reveals the living geology, slowing it down, the molecular. At the widest view the universe is alive, zoom in and bacteria have their own purpose. Of course these sketches were never completed, the sessions way too short for a task this labor intensive with my lack of ability. It's no wonder that when I got my hands on a camera in my mid teens, I never looked back. Ironically over the years, even with the incredible ability to depict detail with large format photography, my efforts with small scenes were never very successful, though I do make a lot of horizonless landscapes overrun with detailed information.

In May of 2010, Beverly, my partner in life of 3 decades, was diagnosed with breast cancer. Our attention was yanked from the concerns of day-to-day life to her care and treatment. I normally worked approximately 60 hours a week with the myriad tasks associated with a very small business, self-employed, in an imploding economy and market. Beverly works full time in retail.

Beverly's gardening has been increasing over the years, particularly after some close friends re-landscaped part of the yard to better suit her activity. Our yard is small so Beverly's efforts involve planting in a variety of containers and pots, and incorporating various other small objects, figurines, statuettes, and indefinable bits. Frankly, I'm not sure where some of this stuff comes from. Pieces come and go, get rotated, break, appear and disappear for no apparent reason. Some come from thrift stores or friends who also frequent that world of second hand oddities. For some reason we have a tricycle amongst other things in the supply pile. She ignores price tags and they become incorporated as bits of color or small shapes. Related items that play a part are for the birds, feeders, baths, houses, etc. and also food. Tomatoes, carrots, beets, potatoes, beans and more found their way into our meals from the garden.

Since we both work so much and in fact haven't had the same days of the week off together in years, I only somewhat superficially observe all this. Though it is very determined and single minded on her part, it is largely solitary work and probably misunderstood by me. Focused, near obsessive, activity is often opaque by observation. The time I spend tweaking things involving photography and printmaking is equally so, with little about it to share without boring everyone including Beverly. I appreciate the garden, everything about it adds ornament to my surroundings and food on my plate, but the thought process of its creation, and the determined particulars of why things are "just so" are outside my attention.

Suddenly I find myself home, a lot. We are dealing with various aspects of treatment and recovery, so I all but stopped working over the summer. The weather was pretty nice much of the time, we all wound up outside part of each day, and the garden was taking off. I can't really stop photographing, so the immediate surroundings and the garden attracted my attention. This work started casually, and some early snapshots wound up as a Facebook album called "stuff Beverly does". The more time I spent doing this, the more my attention expanded into not just the flowers, color, and visual stimulus, but the focus of the person so single-

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just enjoy it. Once when I asked about something that had changed, I was informed that now the two monkeys are looking at each other across the driveway. OK then, much better I guess.

I brought home a better camera, got a bunch of film, and dove in. It was something that gave my attention a break from the very serious health matters at hand and how they were impacting our lives. The close observation of the growing color, food, birds, and ab

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The worms, compost, blossoms, birds, everything was working hard, getting on with it's business without self conscious awareness or the slightest possibility of doubt. Every small frame seemed self sufficient, without need for justification to exist, yet loaded with universal implications, my instincts from earlier years found a worthy task. You'll recognize the same objects or plants in several pictures, I don't care. They are different images, different days, different light, different frame of mind, different. You'll find far more visually compelling and eccentric conglomerations of oddities and unusual or impressive gardens elsewhere, no doubt m

I wandering amongst them with a mind troubled by life's tragedies, yet the sun and breeze on my face.

I don't have complete understanding of why I did this, what exactly Beverly is up to in the garden, what makes flowers bloom, things turn from growing beautifully to growing deadly, birds sing, why the way things look seem infinitely compelling. But the irrepressibility of it, the relentless creative force always evolving is something worth aspiring to be a part of, somehow, without necessity of understanding.

Tyler Boley

May 2011

Winter is over, treatments are ending, the garden is beginning again, I noticed a new pot the other day, and Beverly is doing well.























































































































































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Donna and Beverly, July 24, 2010