

CHAPTER I

AS IT WAS IN THE BEGINNING, SO IT EVER SHALL BE

"I hear beyond the range of sound,  
I see beyond the range of sight,  
H. D. Thoreau

I lay in the fringed hammock, watching the drifting white clouds through the screen of dense long-petioled ailanthus leaves above me. I could hear the rumbling and creaking of a wagon approaching, the horse's hooves slowly clopping down the street toward me. Somewhere the locust-like singing of a lawn mower put the summer afternoon to voice, and half conscious of the sweet drowsy fragrances wafting over me, I became ever more sleepy. In front of me was our white clapboard house, where a sturdy rope, put there by my father, tied the foot end of the hammock up to a porch post. Out of sight behind me, the rope which held up the other end of the hammock was securely tied around the big ailanthus tree.

As the wagon came closer I could hear the bell which I knew the driver was swinging with one hand while he held the reins in the other. The noise woke me out of my somnolence. As the wagon stopped in front of our house my mother came out with a white pitcher in her hand. I had to squirm around, making the hammock swing a bit, to watch a minor entertainment of the day. On the wagon



I could see the usual two big fat wooden barrels with their coverings of huge round lids in the back of the wagon. The wagon man lifted up and set aside one of the big lids, took up a long-handled ladle and dipped it into the milk from which he filled my mother's pitcher. We didn't drink milk in those days as children do now. Milk was used almost entirely in cooking, as making puddings. It was just as well, for such an unsanitary way of distributing milk could have killed off half of my generation before we reached school age. When I think of that dusty road, and that unsterilized long-handled dipper, to say nothing of the flies which were so prevalent because of the horse manure in the road, I squirm. Pasteur had made his discovery by then but the general public knew little about it.

I was about four years old this particular afternoon, a little too old for an afternoon nap. Maybe I had asked to be put into the hammock, for I loved it too much for it to be a punishment. My whole small being vibrated in response to the drifting clouds overhead, the faint breezes from the treetop, the summer sounds, the very greenness of the ailanthus leaves. Spring had only recently come to our street and I was ecstatic over every stir of life. In thinking about this in later life I have wondered if primitive youngsters, born and raised in woody glens in thin-walled huts or tepees, responded as sensually to their surroundings as I had. Aborigine children were more a part of the planet's ecology than I had been; they lived in nature as a part of it. But, were they stirred inwardly, by its vibrations? Many anthropologists think it was that sense of oneness with the vibrating universe which led adult aborigines, then later more civilized peoples, to express their response to the then unnamed ecology around them, in religious rituals.

I must have been conscious of the planet the day I was born. Who knows. Maybe prenatally. For it has been the dead center of my existence since day one of awareness. I began life as a May basket. From then on it seems as if the nuances of daily outdoor existence were slanted my way. A behaviorist might mundanely say that I responded to those things which interested me, that I just tuned out the rest. The rest being what interested the bulk of civilized mankind.

According to some writers and readers, you are supposed to skip over everything that happened before you were ten. It is those kind of people who had so little awareness in their own childhood they have little empathy with their own pre-ten children. In more recent years specialists have come around to recognizing that the early years of childhood not only proclaim the kind of person you will be when you grow up, but that they are the building-block years which make you what you are after you add the superstructure of your adult years. This has been true from primitive tribes to the most modern societies; else why do we pay for teachers to instruct the young? If the years one to ten don't count, what is childhood for?

In any case, readers who yawn over the early years are free to skip this and the next chapter, then get on with it when life becomes more confused.

I record here a few of my own childhood experiences and reactions, which it seems to me at least, influenced the turnings of my later life. They are direction pointers which have always said for me that as it was in the ~~the~~ beginning so it has ever ~~be~~ been, and ever shall be as long as I breathe this planet's air.

I want to step aside for a moment and make an observation as a glimpse into the future. That girl child in the hammock, so innately alert to soft wild aromas, to floating clouds and lulling sounds and green leaves, was to grow up into a world full of dismaying nuances, which, unwittingly to her for too long a time, proclaimed her Nature Girl. "Why can't I be I?" I was to eventually plead with the world. I can best describe what happened to that nature-immersed youngster as she grew into an adult world too culturally remote from its beginnings by quoting E. B. White: "Man's most persistent dream is of a forest pool and a girl coming up out of it unashamed, walking toward him with a wavy motion, childlike in her wonder, a girl exquisitely untroubled, as quiet and accomodating and beautiful as a young sprite. That's really all he wants."

In all my youthful dreamings and yearnings for wildness this aspect of human life didn't exist. I never once suspected it, for years and years and years. But it was there, in the background, nevertheless, like some monster beast when I least suspected it. Once awareness of it was mine, it stymied every great wild dream I had.

Yet, my love of books, and ability to ponder the origins and destiny of mankind brought the words of other meditators into my life; they kept me elevated to the best in mankind. It was Emerson who said, "Welcome, the wood gods murmured through the trees." There were the words of people like Wordsworth, and Rousseau, and Loren Eiseley. There was our historical Sherman Adams, whom we associate with the Washington scene, who wrote, of his youth, "I lived outdoors all the time. The outdoors, the woods, affected me deeply." Donald Worster considers the earth the household of life. I was to learn of a girl

named Alexandria up in Maine, one in the Adirondacks named Anne, and two in the everglades known as Shirley and Bobbie, who spoke my language. And most important of all there has been Henry David Thoreau who frankly stated, and spoke for me a half century before my time, "It does seem to me as if mine were a peculiarly wild nature, which so yearns toward all wildness." But I wasn't to "meet" him until half way through my own wild-yearning life.

I begin when we lived in a modest tree-lined neighborhood in the south end of Hartford. Our house faced a street which was an unpaved road, as were all streets then except the few with cobblestones. There was a lawn out front, not very big but of size enough for my father to find mowing it a chore after his hard day's work. Facing the street from the house, looking to the right you could see the trolley go by on Broad Street. On the corner across for the tracks, was the school where we would begin our abc's. If you walked up the street the other way, eastward, in about three blocks you came to Washington Street. That was a very wide street with huge graceful arching elms that formed a shady canopy over the street in summer. Large imposing houses lined both sides of the street. One I always remembered long after we moved away had big beds of tulips out front every spring.

If you turned left when you reached Washington Street and walked a couple of blocks, you came to a huge-pedestaled statue of Lafayette on a horse out in the middle of the street. Behind Lafayette, and to the left, was and is the imposing fairy-tale-like dome of the State Capitol and its castle-like building. Thus, though

our own neighborhood was modest and quiet, we lived within talking distance of urban splendor. And it was only about three more blocks to the right to downtown's Main Street, from Washington St.

Our small front yard had been fenced in by my father, who had built a picket fence over which he could see easily but we had to wait for our legs to grow more even before we could climb up on it and see what might be going on in the street. It was outside that fence, along the sidewalk, that we learned to roller skate, holding onto the fence for dear life. I was always to remember that as we both became expert skaters, even skating across the city to visit this neighborhood in later days after we moved. The skates have always seemed important to me for they were the best ball bearing skates I was ever to encounter, having been of pre World War I stock. Eventually they took us to many parks and to our favorite museum, the Athenaeum. The "we" I speak of being my year-younger sister and myself. She being of the Unallied-to-the-outdoors clan, whom I rescued from bugs and bees at that age and ever since.

The far end of the backyard was a jungle paradise for the likes of me. It was three or four times deeper than the front yard. My father kept it mowed about two-thirds of the way down to a very high solid wooden fence or wall, so high even he couldn't see over it. In that unkempt last third of the yard grew enchanting weeds, which can be quite intriguing to an adventurous child. Today's yards, groomed with power mowers and edgers, are biological deserts. Urban children seldom get to know the pioneer wild plants which come in on the wind or are carried there in a bird's digestive system. To me those wildlings were more beguiling than toys from a store.

How many children today know the exquisite sensation of sucking

*Silverwood*  
nectar out of a clover blossom? Or making big, fat, green and pink balls out of burdock burs? And playing with the seeds of ladies' thumb and curly dock? I developed such a palship with these weeds down by the back fence that my fascination with their many forms has for all my life kept weeds in their proper perspective as to their place on this planet.

I suppose one of the earliest bits of paradise which imprinted some of those wild things on my mind, was a park about seven or eight blocks up the street beyond the trolley, just over the top of a hill. I know that my mother started pushing me up there in a stroller before I was of walking age for we have a picture of her holding out a daisy to me in the park, which I reached for with obvious interest. As I got a little older there was my sister to tag along, after her turn in the carriage, and the three of us often went up to the park with a picnic lunch, or just for afternoon refreshment on the grass. That would scarcely seem worth mentioning, it being a custom of mothers and small children the world over, if it weren't for the bluets, short-stemmed violets and yellow cinquefoil forming a carpet in the grass. I was sure they had come down from heaven, the way rain falls, but somehow that shower hadn't hit our yard.

Those tiny, common flowers became intermeshed in the web of my life. They are family to me whenever I come upon them, and that is in many places. The three seem eternally associated with one another though there are places where only one or the other exists. I recognize them as planetary imprints on my soul. They are not rare. They definitely are not among the current-day endangered species.

*the violets cinquefoil*

*Sherrwood*

It was the spring of my fifth year that my innate desire for research, to find out what makes things tick, became more obvious. There were still a few banks of unmelted snow and ice on the north side of the house in the shade of the upper back yard. I was old enough now to remember that snow and ice would disappear for the summer. I decided I was going to save some of it, and see how it felt on a hot summer day. Into a discarded tobacco tin I'd found, one of those flat, oval-shaped tins of yesteryear, I packed as much snow as it would hold, and clamped the lid down tight. I dug a hole in a soft, muddy spot, with an old spoon my mother had long since given me as a play tool. Into the hole went the tin and its snow. I covered the tin well, and tamped down the mud over it with my feet. This was a secret. I told no one, for I wanted to surprise everyone come hot summer.

Not until sometime in mid July did I remember the tin of snow. Not having been trained in marking buried treasure, I had a time of it scraping up the surface of the upper back yard trying to find that tin. But eventually I uncovered a corner of it. In great anticipation I dug it out on the now dry soil, and opened the lid. Of course the tin was filled with water. The lid must have been a tight fit as the ~~wt~~ water had not leaked out. In dismay I ran to my mother. Even with her city-oriented mind she was able to explain to me that once the frost is out of the ground nothing would stay frozen in it, and that snow was frozen rain. I learned so much from that jolting lesson, which helped me make decisions in my work with soils in later years, that I felt more intrigued than disappointed.

It was one of those bits of knowledge which a primitive child learns without benefit of books or television.

*missed*



*Sherrwood*

An added attraction among the weeds down by the back fence were the insects which visit them. They were such fascinating-behaving creatures that sometimes they caught my fancy more than the flowers. One such creature which I considered a play pal was the grasshopper. They came in all sizes over a summer season, down among the burdocks. In fact, grasshoppers were to unwittingly create a trauma in my young life. One day when I was fingering the soft, velvety-downy leaf of a burdock, much the way orientals finger a piece of smooth jade, a grasshopper jumped onto the leaf by my hand. I grabbed him and gently held him in my hand, delighted with the feel of his scratchy big hind legs on my hand. He spit brown juice at the base of one of my fingers, and as a neighborhood child had told me that was grasshopper honey I licked it up. I couldn't taste anything sweet, like honey from a clover blossom, so that night at bedtime, when my mother came in to tuck me in and kiss me goodnight, I made the mistake of telling her about the grasshopper juice. She screwed her face up with such a horrified expression I can still see her grimace today. She said, "I will never kiss you goodnight again." She sure must have meant it for she didn't, ever again.

But by the time I was old enough to be trusted to keep away from grasshopper tobacco-colored brown spit I was entering the tomboy stage and didn't want anyone kissing me anyway. In time, of course, I was to realize that it would be better by far for a parent to wash out a child's mouth with soap and water than to permit a ~~whisk~~ grasshopper to intervene between the emotions of mother and child. My mother was of the squeamish ilk. Who never should have been presented with a nature child. But there were no child psychologists in those days to help her bridge the gap.

*Shrewswood*  
 What became an indelible experience, its vibrations reaching right up through time to the present, occurred the spring that I was five. Three kindergarten teachers <sup>m</sup>whom my mother knew, invited me to go on a trolley ride with their classes to a park of which I neither remember the name nor the location. It could have been outside of Hartford as in those days the trolleys went to many outlying rural towns. A favorite treat for people of all ages and occasions was to go on a long trolley ride, Sundays and holidays.

The scene at that park, however, is as of yesterday. There was a park bench, on which the teachers sat, their long skirts reaching to the ground, while we children played under a dense canopy of large tall trees with branches very high up. Scattered all over the ground were fascinating little brown things, oval in shape, with caps on them which could be pulled off. I had never seen such things before. I took one to a teacher for naming. She said "It's an acorn." What a beautiful word! What beguiling toys! I was ecstatic over them.

Most of my life I have kept a corns in sight somewhere in the house, or in my tent when camping. Acorns are not only a tie for me to the magic wonder of childhood, but they represent, literally in a nutshell, the life force and its myriad variety. On those moments of existence, when the vicissitudes of human life have tended to bow my spirit, I have picked up an acorn and held it in the palm of my hand. In my mind's eye I see the xylem and phloem cells of the tree's wood developing and feel the sap flowing up to the leaves or running down to the storage roots from the chlorophyll factories. The great oak spreads from my palm to far over my head. Nothing can stop it, not man's churlishness, nor ~~inhumanity~~ <sup>inhumanity</sup> ~~inhumanity~~ to man,

nor abusiveness of women and children, nor the endless stupid wars of men and the ignorance of the human race. Nothing, except that now, of course, a nuclear bomb could stop the flow of all sap one of these days. But while the acorn is in the cup of my hand it grows in my mind's eye according to the serene orderliness of the universe. The petty human worry which caused me to pick it up is gone.

Even now, as I write this, I have acorns on my desks. I know they can be lethal in a house. Ralph Emerson's grandmother didn't see the acorns her grandchildren were playing with on the stairs and she landed at the bottom with broken bones. My acorns are kept under control and they serve me well. I never feel that I deprive those on my desk from attaining their normal destiny, for we can't plant all the acorns for then there would be no space for maples, birches and pines. I might be cheating a squirrel out of lunch, though.

It was the spring of my sixth year that wildflowers exploded en masse before my eyes and nose. I wasn't to start school until fall, but the teachers sent word to my mother that I was old enough to participate in the flower parade to the cemetery on Decoration Day, and if she would have me out in the street in front of our house that morning, in a white dress and shoes, I'd be in the parade.

By the time I stepped through our gate into the street, my mother having delayed that exciting moment by fussing over my hair and shoes, everyone was already in place. It was easy to tuck me in as the end of the parade was in front of our house, where the younger girls were standing in rows. From there all the way to the trolley line there were rows of older and older girls, then in front of them began the rows of smaller boys with large boys down

to the curb before the trolly<sup>e</sup> tracks.

All of the children were carrying flowers from their yards or from fields far away. The few without flowers were being quietly supplied by the teachers. Many of the bossoms were wildflowers, some of which I recognized, such as daisies, buttercups and violets. But there were also tulips and daffodils, and great curving branches of bridal wreath from yards.

Some of the children carried their flowers in their hands, but many had simple baskets. I was handed a small square basket, such as we can still buy strawberries in today. The girls just ahead of me had oval-shaped baskets which we stull know as grape baskets. In all of them were a mix of wild and yard flowers. Mine had violets with the longest stems I had ever seen. I also had a few buttercups, a sprig of lilac, and one blue iris, all tucked into a damp mat of green moss which held my attention as much as the flowers. I'd seen moss before but this was the first time I'd seen it gathered and used. It seemed to me like an emerald green magic substance enchantingly fragrant.

Some of the taller girls up front kept coming back to help keep us smaller ones in line, and checked to make sure all had some flowers and could hold them without dropping them. Those girls were the most unbelievable part of the parade for they had great chains of daisies and buttercups around their necks, and some carried pillows of buttercups. I didn't know there were so many daisies and buttercups in the world. The fragrance of so many flowers at once all but levitated me. I throbbed with the excitment of being in a fairyland of flowers. The intoxication of it as we started to march, the strange sensation of walking in a magic land still overhelms me sometimes when I happen

*Sherwood*  
to recall it when sitting quietly outdoors, especially when I am in the midst of the fragrances of wild plants and mosses. Surely that experience affected some aspects of my life, as some psychologist might discover were he to fathom my reasons for doing some of the things which I ~~did~~ have done.

Once we started marching, straight down the street, across the trolley tracks and up the hilly street westward to the cemetery, I couldn't see much up ahead because of the crowd of children, so ~~as~~ I concentrated on my own enchanting basket of flowers. I was going to place it tenderly on a cemetery grave. By the time we reached the cemetery gate which we were supposed to go through, ~~the~~ <sup>the</sup> older boys and girls had disappeared. Only the younger children were still lined up in the street. I was becoming very impatient to see those great daisy chains and buttercup pillows on the graves. But, the rest of this tale is blah. The few teachers who were left collected our baskets and put them inside the gate on the ground. Then they turned us around and we marched back to the school where our parents were to pick us up.

My disappointment was abysmal. I have often wondered if any of the other children were as disappointed as I. I would never see those chains and pillows of flowers on the graves. And my little basket of flowers got left behind. It would die if no one gave it a drink. Maybe today's teachers aren't that blind to the feelings of the young. I could not only think, I could grieve. What I couldn't do was express it. That sudden, empty ending has remained a great gap in my whole life. It can't be rerun for me, like today's movies. I just will never see it.

In later years my own grandparents were buried in that cemetery. But I have never been able to go there, other than drive by in the

street. The traumatic shock of being shut out of Fairyland at the gate went too deep. There was another flower parade, however, in my older years, which in some ways compensated. But anything with so much beauty and inspiration where children are concerned should be considered a memory cushion against the vicissitudes of life up head. It is better for a child to see a fantasy through.

Three years after that episode we moved to the north end of the city, within a half block of Keney Park, Hartford's famous Ten Mile Woods. For me, Keney Park was an imprinting Eden. Its grassy sunbeamed fields, the forest shadows and fragrances, such almost untouched wildness on the edge of a big city, was a place one might expect to encounter Pegasus and dancing elves. From the gate which was a block from our house, the Park extended all the way to a part of the town of Windsor, then and now called Wilson Station. It was a long stretch of many miles of woods, some open fields, and beautiful red sandstone roads. In some light the roads took on a purple-lavender color. I never did walk from our end of the Park all the way to Wilson Station, but I did become acquainted with it in sections.

Except in winter, when the snow was too deep on the paths, we took a short cut to school through the Park, a difference of one half mile to three quarters of a mile or more. Between the simple, two-post gateway one block from our house and the fancy, big heavy gateway near the school, Keney Park was a slightly groomed wild area. If you walked straight ahead from our gate you soon came to a pond, known as the skating pond. On the far side of the pond there was a vast open field which extended to the left all the way to the school gate. But, if instead of heading straight

to the pond, you took a path to the left, just inside the gate, you would quickly be in an open woodland. Before long you came to a partially open area on the right, where a small mucky pond, known as Mud Pond, was a temptation to the very young. The forest path continued on past the pool, curved to the right shortly, and soon led into the big open field which extended the rest of the way to the big gate near the school. Most of the time we took this woodland and field path to school.

The field had its own lures, for that was in the days before power mowers. The city provided a flock of sheep, tended by a shepherd and his dog Rex, to keep the grass nibbled off. There were quite a few benches around the periphery of the field, and one here and there under the few big shade trees out in the field. This was long before it ~~ENTERED~~ entered anyone's head to vandalize park benches. Park benches were a part of our culture, taken for granted by all. In summer we often ran over to the Park field just to sit on a bench and watch the shepherd raise his cane and point to a bush where a few sheep had wandered and see the dog arrow his way right into the bushes and bark the woolly animals out into the open.

At the northern end of the field, to the right, the land rose up a steep slope. The hill could be seen from all over the open field; it had a fringe of evergreen trees over its top. Neighborhood knew this as Grandfather's Hill. We seldom followed the sheep that far in the hot summer sun, but we loved to watch them disappear over the lip of the hill, knowing they were heading for the next hill, which we called Lookout. Lookout wasn't quite as steep but it had a longer drawn-out open area at the bottom which was ideal for sledding and toboggans.

Once frost came and the grass stopped growing the sheep disappeared. But we soon learned where they went to. Just up Vine Street, a few blocks from our neighborhood. A sheep fold there was tucked back into the edge of the Park. This was a child's story-book place, yet though my sister and I went there nearly every Saturday morning in winter we seldom saw other visitors. Even my sister was enchanted, for the beasties were safe behind fences. It was a warm, fragrant place, redolent with sweet hay. The sheep contentedly nibbled on wisps of hay, or lay down where easy to see, or at times they milled close to the fence where we could put our hands through and touch their soft warm wool. Come spring it became our chore to help feed the lambs from a milk bottle with a nipple.

Another winter Saturday activity was joining the small groups of people at the skating pond. No one in my family, however got into ice skating. Try as I was determined to do I just couldn't balance properly on my skates. My mother blamed it on my skinny ankles, but I was sure then, and since, that I had the wrong kind of skates for me. I don't know if my parents couldn't afford better skates for us, or if they had no expertise in judging kinds and quality. I had all the derring do necessary to take off across the ice. But the long narrow skates that had to be clamped onto my shoes somehow never worked as satisfactorily as my roller skates. They had to be strapped on, in addition to the clamps, but I never got control of them. Now and then someone showed up with shoe <sup>skates,</sup> ~~skates,~~ which I secretly envied. I remember begging for a pair but so few people had them I suspected they were costly. My parents were fair to us and if they bought a pair for one they would have to for the other;



I am sure two pairs of shoe skates was too much, especially as children's feet keep growing so that shoe skates wouldn't be usable for more than one or two seasons.

One definite discomfort I remember was that girls wore long cotton stockings, meaning that the feet of them were always clammy in winter. Since I couldn't exercise by getting out there on my skates, the more cold and numb became my feet as I stood around on the snow. It wasn't until I was much older that wool socks came into existence, at least for city wear. Hanging around the skating pond in winter was one of the few outdoor activities which soon had me wanting to go home.

Long after the ice was out of the ponds, Mud Pond in the woods along the trail beckoned to at least one child spirit. Both my mother and the shepherd had warned us not to go wading in that pond, as we sometimes did along the edges of the big pond. But no one had said why and I just had to find out what was in it. The water was too dark to see any fish or polywogs swimming around, and I didn't believe in monstors so I knew none was in there. I took off my shoes, unhooked the garters holding up my stockings, and pulled off the long stockings and dropped them on the ground, as I wriggled my bare toes in the cool mud. My sister and a young friend stood watching me, half scared, half intrigued. The water at its edges was dark brown with squisky mud. I was in my glory. Feeling free and wild, with no grown-up to say no, I held my dress up, and aiming toward the center of the pond, which seemed within easy reach, I was soon up to my knees in soupy brown mud. The water all around me was dark and mysterious looking. It even began to look dangerous. I quailed a bit at going any further, aware I had not yet touched real firm bottom with my

bare feet. What if it were a deep bottomless hole out there in the middle?

I started back, satisfied that I had at least found out what the mud felt like squashing around bare legs. As I reached shallower water and my legs emerged from the dark water, my sister pointed to them and began to cry. Looking down over my held-up skirt, I could see several black, small but longish creatures clinging to my legs. In my excitement I let my dress down and ran for shore, splashing the muddy water all over my dress, forgetting the scolding that would bring from my mother. Somehow I didn't need to be told. Maybe I had seen them somewhere before. I knew instantly that my legs were almost covered with bloodsuckers. And I didn't know how to get them off! I tried pulling one and he just stretched out for as long as I pulled. I hated to touch any of them. I screamed to my sister to go find me a stick. Not used to seeing me panic, or be scared of anything, she became so frightened<sup>n</sup> she couldn't move. The child with us ran around hunting a stick and fortunatley found one. I scraped the vile creatures off, dancing around and yelling as they fell, trying not to step on the huddled dark globs on the ground. Need I say, I never waded in THAT mud hole again, or any future muddy habitat.

There was a small opening in the woods not far from the mud pond, which clearing was almost entirely usurped by a massive spreading chestnut tree. There was a bench under it where we often sat on our way to or from school. The two ~~XXXXXXXX~~<sup>falls</sup> that we lived in that area we spent some time after school smashing the chestnut burs with our heels,- those which the squirrels hadn't already opened or been split open by their fall. The great prickly burs were scattered all over the ground;; as we knew of other such chestnut trees elsewhere we took the burs and nuts for granted. The only

time we bothered to bring chestnuts home was one day when my mother said she would make some chestnut stuffing with them. By the next year all of those chestnuts were gone, killed by a blight brought in from overseas. Children today would love them.

World War I, though it wasn't called One at the time as it was assumed it was a war to end all wars, was raging in Europe while we were spending our childhood basking in the serenity of Keney Park. On school days, in spring and fall, and during the summer, I often slipped out of the house before my parents were up, and went to the Park to explore the many paths. At first I was just out to enjoy the adventure and to enjoy the utter ecstasy of the sounds and fragrances of the dewy woods. Usually I left my sister at home because I tired of rescuing her from lions and tigers, which she was positive were about to spring out of the bushes at us. Somehow I knew, I suppose from stories our parents read to us, that lions and tigers were not denizens of our part of the world. But somehow, my sister, raised in the same family, never got that message. Why? I have found this to be true of many families, especially those raised in cities. Both young and old prefer to believe in the terrors of their imaginations.

What brought these wanderings in Keney Park into focus, and became a lifelong interest, was a contest our fifth grade teacher set up for us. She offered prizes to the children who brought in the most wildflower species that spring, before school closed in June. From then on I had a grail to follow. And still do. Did that teacher but know! I often think of her, but her face is a blur behind daisies, cinquefoils, violets and anemones. She was one of the major imprinters of my life, but I don't even remember her name.

Those early morning lone walks, or should I say

running along the Keney Park paths, netted me more wildflowers than I had suspected existed. Never again would I compile a first list that long. There were the large-petaled lavender blossoms of wild geranium near Mud Pond, where I also found the first long-stemmed violets I had seen since the flower parade. Wind anemone was along paths in damp places. Out in the big field were my long-time pals, the short-stemmed violets, bluets, pussytoes and cinquefoil.

As the calendar followed the sun I brought in white daisies, buttercups, sheep sorrel, ladies' sorrel, curly dock and peppergrass. I found my first unbelievable Jack-in-the-pulpit near Mid Pond and, back from the pond grew a mat of adder's tongue leaves from which grew some beautiful little lilies. Once more I found and loved with my eyes the miniature white star-like chickweed blossoms. It was a special day when I found a cluster of rue anemone, dainty as lace.

As the contest ended in June many of the commoner species which I knew were not yet in bloom, like Queen Anne's lace, butter and eggs, and the goldenrods and asters. But since no one else could find them either it didn't matter that they couldn't be added in the contest.

A week before school closed I was in for a breath-taking surprise. My teacher called me up to her desk. I assumed I was going to be scolded for something, but she looked out over the class and announced I had won first prize in the wildflower contest. She handed me a small, oblong-shaped book which said WILDFLOWERS on the cover. Lightning hit! Grown ups cared enough about wildflowers to put them in a book! Wildflowers were a subject in a book like history, or arithmetic, or geography?

*Shenwood*

It was from this little elementary book, shaped like today's small, person<sup>a</sup>l check books, a toy compared to the identification guides and botanists of the world in my future, that I so well memorized wildflower pictures I could recognize them in the wild without having the book with me. But here, in my hand, for the first time I saw pictures of pink ladyslippers, cardinal flower, Dutchman's breeches and Blue bells.

The first wildflower which I recognized in Keney Park from having pored over that little book, was on a path which entered the Park a few blocks beyond the sheepfold. You had to cross a dusty dead-end street, Tower Avenue, which had no houses nearby. Near that road, on the right, there was a Park entrance into a woody area. My mother had taken us up there for a walk, so we knew of a small clear brook in there to the left, where she had permitted us to take off our shoes and stockings and go paddling. We were now old enough to find our way up there alone, and I, for one, was bent on exploration.

When we had been in there with my mother I had noticed a path off to the right in a clearing in the woods. I found it immediately and my sister willingly followed. To our surprise there was a narrow brook, down in a sort of ditch, with a little bridge or causeway over one spot where the water slid through with more energy than it showed along the ditch. The banks were a foot or more high with muddy walls, but the brook bottom was clean sand, giving the water a silvery look as it slid over the bottom.

As I stepped onto the little causeway I looked down in utter surprise at a thick bed of forget-me-nots. I recognized them in-

*Sherwood*  
stantly for they filled a page in my little book. I shuffled back and forth along the top of the bank, loving the for-get-me-nots with my eyes, not quite believing what I was seeing. I probably would have remained under their spell until dark had my sister not been with me. Though she, too, found them intriguing, she soon became restless, and wanted to go back home. It was mid afternoon by the time we arrived so I knew we didn't have much time to explore.

But the tiny blue and yellow flowers weren't the only surprise of the day. Reluctant to leave the open space in the woods I urged my sister, "Let's just follow this path to the edge of the woods." As she could see that was only a short distance she agreed. Though the summer sun was still rather high in the sky the woods looked dark. Even I shied from entering a dark forest which was new to me.

Just as we approached the edge of the woods there suddenly stepped out of the shadows onto the open path, just a few feet from us, a girl my sister's size and a woman who was no doubt her mother. The girl held in one hand a whole bouquet of pink ladyslippers. My mouth must have hung open. My thoughts were racing. They were so beautiful, so very different from anything I had ever seen. They were astounding. But our teacher had told us never to pick ladyslippers. I wanted to scream at that kid. But I didn't dare utter even one quiet word in the presence of her mother.

Where had they found the ladyslippers? I knew that even if it were in my power to order the girl to drop them they were already picked. They couldn't be saved. I had well learned, as most children seem to be slow to do, or else they don't care, that picked flowers soon wilt and die if you don't get them into water; but also, that even if you put them in water they last but a few days and can never make any seeds for next year as my father had explained. As my sister

and I stepped back onto the grass out of their way, the lady and the girl with the fabulous pink flowers passed by.

I stood staring after them, unable to move for moments, as I watched them disappear toward the Park gate. My sister began fussing. She pulled at my dress. I was in a swirling world of flower-pink and all she could think of saying was "I wanna go home."

In my later years I was to associate the memory of these mini-adventures of where and when I saw a new wildflower for the first time with the questions, "Where were you when you heard President Kennedy was shot? For all too often the first wildflower of a kind for me I saw when it was in someone's hand, or otherwise in a picked bouquet, as doomed as was John Kennedy. But, there are so many wildflower species the law of averages has brought me more memories of discovering them in their own habitat, untouched by the hand of mankind.

I vowed to come back soon to find where the ladyslippers grew. Maybe my father would take us that way on our next family picnic. But it was not to be. I never saw that section of Keney Park again. That particular Eden slipped through the cracks for me. I was many miles away before I saw pink ladyslippers again. But that little girl and her mother have remained a freeze-frame in my memory. For much of that part of Keney Park, and other areas, have been so trashed by vandals one dare not enter the Park without a police escort.

We moved that fall, still in the north end of the city, but closer to the Barbour Street entrance to the Park, where there was a caretaker's house; it was of dark stained wood which made it fit into the shady evergreen woods there as if a log cabin. The caretaker, a one-armed man with a collie dog, knew my father. We usually stopped there when we went on walks and picnics at that end of the

Park, so he and my parents could chat awhile as my sister and I played on the swings nearby.

One Sunday after church we carried a big picnic lunch with us on the trolley to the Barbour Street gate. The caretaker had told us of a nice walk on paths through the woods out back, so that was our goal this time. It was a warm summer day and as we left the darker shadows of the evergreen trees we entered a hardwood forest where I was almost intoxicated by the richly fragrant rising airs. I was as contented as if walking through Eve's Eden.

It must have been mid to late July, for a half mile or so beyond the caretaker's house we came to a break in the woods where grew a tall tangle of blackberry bushes on our right; the vines were loaded with big, fat juicy blackberries. Not having expected such a free surprise we had nothing with us in which to collect the berries, so we tarried while we ate them to our fill.

The woods closed in again beyond the berry patch, but after a short walk we came to a thinning of the woods on our left. The trees were taller, but further apart; beneath their canopy was a sunken glen of huge ferns. The ferny, swampy area was two to three feet lower than the path. The ferns were so huge, no doubt cinnamons and interrupted, they would have been over my head if I had dared step down there, or were permitted by my mother to do so. My fantasy at the time was of gnomes, elves and fairies <sup>i</sup>living down in there. Later I visioned dinosaurs among those ferns.

About thirty years later, wondering if those big trees had choked out some of the ferns, I made the mistake of going back to see. I should have obeyed the dictum, "Never go back." The



whole area was wide open to the glaring light of the treeless sky. The bottom of what had been the fern bed was mud, half dried out and caked. It was cut across in all directions by motorcycle ruts, and was no longer fit for elves or dinosaurs. Mankind had trashed it.

But that day when we were walking the cool forest path, we soon went around a curve to the left. A wall of sweet warm fragrances met us like a soft caressing wave. It was brighter up ahead. My sister and I skipped along, eager to be the first to get there. We ran out from under the cool forest canopy into a huge sunny field, bigger than the sheep meadow near our school.

Those odors which met us as we went around that curve in the woods made a life-long impression on me. It never occurred to me to ask if anyone else in the family noticed the difference between the cool woods fragrances and that wave of warm field aromas. I have since had reason to wonder if my sense of smell was keener than theirs, and of most people's. But how does one compare olfactory acuteness? I once read a statement by a man who said, "No one remembers what a rose or a gardenia smells like." I can instantly recall and differentiate in retrospect between the fragrances of a rose, a lily, a clump of arbutus and witch hazel blossoms, as well as a gardenia. But how can I prove it? I have learned that woods and fields have a fourth dimension for me, of redolent natural perfumes, each <sup>has</sup> ~~with~~ its own incense. The wild tawny hawkweed was to prove that was the aroma which dominated that field. Today I'd love to tie it under my nose.

The following year we again took a picnic lunch with us, to that big fragrant field, but this time it was earlier in the summer. When we went to sit in the grass and arrange our picnic we found ourselves sitting in a vast crop of wild strawberries. This time we emptied

*Sherwood*  
a box of its sandwiches to have something to put them into. Wild strawberries are such small red gems my sister and I were appointed stem-hullers. They couldn't have been too sanitarily clean by the time we ate them. My mother promised to bring a sponge cake the next time we came and make strawberry shortcake out of them, minus the cream. That did eventually happen, another year.

The path on which we entered the field from the woods continued through the field, bisecting it all the way to what looked like a wide path or a road up ahead, judging by a few families we could see walking there. When we got to that point it was one of those handsome red roads seen even back in Grandfather's Hill area. I never did see a horse and carriage go by anywhere in the Park. It was almost as if those handsome roads, with lavender-purple tints in the shadows, were posing, like an art scene, waiting for something to happen. If ever roads were built before their time these were it. Fortunately for me, automobile traffic did not happen in Keney Park in my time so I have no discordant memories of those handsome roads.

My parents had decided to continue resting on the grass among the strawberries, and when we reached the road we could look back and see them still where we had left them. We were about to turn back to them when we saw two children running on the path where it extended across the road. The field came to a sudden end in a wide band of trees and we were surprised to see the two children seem to disappear as if going down something steep. We ran to the spot and found a steep slope, with stone stairs visible further down. We followed the others down. To our astonishment we were soon going down into a gorge where a wide, clear, shallow brook ran over myriads of flat stones the color of the Keney Park roads.

Even more surprising was a wall of crumbling flat rocks on our left. There were many laminated layers of what we eventually learned was red sandstone, common in the Connecticut River valley. Inquisitive fingers easily dislodged the crumbling pieces. Now we knew where the Park roads got their reddish colorin.

It seemed fifteen to twenty degrees cooler in this hidden shady depression, having just come in from the hot field. This was my first gorge. A very special Eden which limned itself into my memory. It often seems, in retrospect, to be my first real awareness of microclimate changes within a few feet, although I was always conscious of the contrast between shade and open sun in summer, as most people are, and of chilly wind in open spots in winter.

That was the day we discovered we were at the end of the Ten Mile Woods. We saw a family with several children climbing upward on the path, opposite the end where we had come down. We followed them, expecting to emerge out in the field again; instead, when we reached the top level we could see a few feet up ahead ~~and~~ <sup>that</sup> there was the big gateway of Wilson Street Station. Maybe our parents would want to get the trolley home, here. We ran all the way back to proclaim our discovery. It pleased me they chose to walk back to the Barbour Street entrance.

By the time I was twelve and thirteen we still lived within walking distance of Keney Park and often took our sleds up to Lookout Hill, where we were now big enough to join others. Sometimes, in summer, we pushed a baby carriage up there, my godchild being the first occupant of the carriage under my stewardship. The term "babysitter" was not yet coined. She was part of our gang.

It was at this stage that we lived on the top floor of a three-story building which faced due west. Down below, across the

street, there was a large, open weedy field; you could easily get to it by clambering up a steep bank from the sidewalk. The field was so big it extended almost two blocks to Albany Avenue to the southwest. On the western horizon, from the high perch of our front room, I could look over that field to Talcott Mountain and its Heublein Tower almost due west, and Avon Mountain a bit to the left. I became almost addicted to watching clouds come up over that western ridge of hills. In the two years that we lived there I became almost as proficient as the weatherman in the newspaper. With no radio or TV in those days, and very limited meteorological instruments available to the experts, anyone who watched the sky diligently and often enough could become at least an amateur weather prognosticator. I watched the clouds come up over the mountain and spread out above the city the way modern bird watchers scan every winged creature that passes in their neighborhood

Because my mother was very nervous about thunder storms so were my sister and I. In summer I'd watch threatening anvil-shaped clouds come up from behind the Tower and move toward us. Sharp lightning was so bewitching I just had to watch it approach yet it was very scary. Sometimes I couldn't keep my eyes off its threatening menace. But once it arrived too close, and the thunder exploded and shook the house, I ran for the kitchen at the back of the house. My mother and sister and I would huddle there, listening to the crashing overhead, momentarily expecting something in our house to be hit. But I was instantly aware when the storm had passed the zenith over us and was starting to recede to the east. Then I'd run back to the front room to see if another storm were coming up over the mountain's rim. Usually there were just harmless tatters of clouds left in sight.

But fair weather clouds, cumulus like white sheep, or high cirrus or strato-cumulus, were almost as fascinating<sup>a</sup> though they didn't produce any fireworks. They were safe clouds coming up over the mountain. But from that high parlor perch the sunsets were Nature's special show put on for me. I became a skywatcher. No matter what was in the sky I had to watch it. That has proven a fortunate habit, especially when I was camping in the days before portable radios, when it paid off to read the sky aright.

One of the things which started me reading<sup>g</sup> newspapers when a child was watching the weather reports. It became a game for me, to see when the weather man was right, or I. I never knew who the weather man was; his report just appeared in the upper right hand corner of the evening newspaper, with a more detailed report on an inside page. His name was never signed anywhere. But I learned more than I realized, pitting my observations against his.

I did miss out on sunrises at that part of my life, because of the big, tall trees along the cemetery fence out back. But I often did go out there to look at the rosy glow behind the leaves. But that cemetery opened other views for me. It was a very large one, beginning at the eastern edge of our backyard and extending the distance of two blocks to Windsor Ave. There was a very high, unclimbable board wall which prevented us from getting into the cemetery from our yard. But two blocks down the street there was an entrance, which we often used to take a short cut to the new school we were attending. We often played hide and seek in there, for some of the monuments were very large, but we never did any damage as some young people do today.

There was a tall electric light pole out in front of our house, and we often sat on the curb<sup>d</sup> under it plotting our little

adventures and games. I had begun what we called an Indian Club, to which belonged the six of us who played together. Sittin on the curb under the street light one early evening one of our playmates suggested we talk a walk through the cemetery some night after dark. I was instantly enthralled with the idea, though I quickly saw that the one who made the suggestion had only been fooling. But I was no scairdy cat and <sup>w</sup>anted to prove it. By ridiculing them all for their timidity, today called peer pressure, I worked out a plan and declared that anyone who didn't come was a sissy.

To make sure they didn't all desert me I chose a night with a bright moon. They did all meet me at the chosen time under the lamppost, the more timid ones having come because they were afraid they would miss something. None of us had flashlights; if they existed then I hadn't heard of them. But it was long before the days of crime explosion, so other than imaginative fears about ghosts there was nothing to hurt us in the cemetery.

We started off bravely enough, marching down the street to the cemetery gate, singing "K-k-k-Katie," then, "Over There", the two most popular songs of the moment as World War I was still on. Then we turned into the gate on our left. It was my first long trek in moonlight, and I was surprised to see what shadows headstones cast all around us. It was obvious that the three younger ones, including my sister, were frightened, so I ordered them all to sing loud and continuously. We wove in and around the big headstones which we recognized from daytime games. Then we tramped back to the lamp post, - conquerors.

There was one daylight episode in the cemetery we carried off successfully, to our way of thinking. When we were sitting on the curb one evening in the spring, I was thinking of Decoration Day. I had often noticed that some of the graves in the big cemetery had many

flowers put on them on week-ends or holidays, while others were always bare. "Why don't we go to the cemetery late in the afternoon of Decoration Day and gather up the flowers from graves that have too many and spread them on graves that have none?"

Everybody laughed and clapped. One of the kids said, "It's a nice thing for the Indian Qub to do." As Decoration Day approached I told them to make up any story they had to, to get their mothers to permit them to wear white dresses that afternoon. "Meet me at 4:00 at the cemetery gate," was the final order.

Through some magic of persuasion known only to the very young, but don't forget that this was in the day when most children were "good," most of them obeyed family adults, and they could be trusted, they all appeared at the gate dressed in white, for every little girl in those days had at least one white dress for church or special events. Usually the task of ironing their ruffles and frills limited their frequent use.

I instructed them to walk down to Windsor Avenue first and notice where the most flowers were, and where there were none. Then on the way back through to our street they would know where to gather bouquets and where to deliver them. Nobody needed much teaching about it. If there was a caretaker there in my day I never saw him. Yet it is amazing that no one saw six girls walking through the cemetery, gathering up great armloads of flowers from some graves and spreading them out on others. No one approached us. We had a whole big cemetery to ourselves in which to play Robin Hood. We already knew

where most of the bare graves were. It was great fun spreading the flower plunder all around. Today that would be considered vandalism; we could be taken to court for it. Especially as many of the flowers had come from greenhouses, nursery gardens and flower shops, hence were expensive. But economics was not within our ken. How does one explain to children what is sharing, what is being kind to others, what is trying to make the world more fair, while still being wrong?

The next Saturday I went for a walk by myself in the cemetery to check up on our good deed. It was discouraging to see most of the flowers ~~had~~ had spread around were so wilted or dead, while those on graves where there were vases with water were still in fair condition. I already knew, of course, that picked flowers don't last very long when not in water. I discovered that two graves at the back of the cemetery near our high fence had been passed by. Not only were there no dead flowers on them but there wasn't even a blade of grass growing on them. Only bare, dry dirt.

I had an idea. Unwittingly a precursor of things to come. Returning to the street near the light pole I climbed the high bank on the other side of the street, and ran diagonally across the big open field on the right, to a stand of bushes in which I knew there was a muddy stream. Just as I had hoped, as I had seen them in there before, some of the violets were still in bloom. I dug up four plants with a stick, as they were easily dislodged in the wet soil. I ran back to the cemetery with them, and, using another stick, dug two holes on each of the graves and planted the violets. I apologized to the graves for having forgotten them on Decoration Day.



I vaguely remember thinking the nice damp violet roots would make the grave soil cool and moist. But when I visited them a few days later I found the the plants were dead, dried up. No one had to tell me why. I caught on at once. These violets had been growing in cool wet soil near a brook; I had moved them to soil so dry not even grass would grow there. That was a habitat microclimate lesson I wordlessly learned which lasted the rest of my life.

It was about this time that my sister and I climbed up the back stairway one evening, coming in from playing under the street light. As we emerged onto the back porch there was a lightness in the sky which made me look up. I was astounded to see beautiful pastel colors rippling across the northeastern sky! I pointed to it wordlessly. In fright we both dropped down onto our knees and started praying. I don't know what she was thinking but I got the notion that the curtains of Heaven were opening and God would be looking at us. Suddenly greater drapery folds of pink and lavender rippled across the sky.

"Aurora borealis!" I yelled, and jumping up I ran into the house to tell my parents. How often I had admired the color plate of the northern lights in our encyclopedia. Here it was! For real! Once more I recognized something from a picture.

At the school which we now attended a special teacher came twice a week to give us lesson in nature study. Need I say, her appearance became the highlight of my life. She brought in such amazing things as small wooden boxes with glass tops in which were live ants, crickets and spiders. Or pinned dried butterflies. She

was Miss Adeline Thurston, one of the marvels in my life. She taught me many more wildflowers, and gave me my first introduction to birds by hanging color charts for her class to see the common birds in our neighborhood or parks. I couldn't believe that such exotic looking creatures as orioles and tanagers lived nearby.

We were in the seventh and eighth grades when we knew Miss Thurston. I had acquired a very old second-hand bicycle; when she learned that she sent a note to my mother one day inviting me to go biking with her in Keney Park the next Saturday. Strange, for that was a glory moment for no other teacher before had ever singled me out, I have never been able to remember where we went or what we saw. Maybe it rained and we didn't go. Miss Thurston was a small person, with iron-gray short hair; she must have been a modern spirit as girls and women were just beginning to cut their hair. In our house, all hair was still long. How did she happen to have such outdoor interests? Was it lonely for her? I shall never know.

After I graduated from Grammar school I never saw Miss Thurston again. But once I grew up I was often to wish she lived nearby as I soon found myself alone in my outdoor interests. Many years later Miss Thurston sent me a note from New York State. Then, one day, when I was even older, and had a car, I drove over there to see her. I had waited too long. Just two months earlier she had died, at age ninety-two. I've been destined all my life to wonder about her, but youth lets time slide by. She could have been my mentor, as Emerson was to Thoreau in his younger years, as Aristotle was to his disciples, though in more simple ways. She could have helped me bridge that gap between the rest of the world and my loner-interests much faster than it took me to do it by myself. A classic case of lost opportunity. And, could I have done anything for her?