"I also dreamed that I might gather the wild herbs, or carry evergreens to such villagers as loved to be reminded of the woods, even to the city, by hay-cart loads."  H. D. Thoreau

The year before the People's Forest experience I had earned a master's degree in wildlife management at Cornell. Like most young and innocent people, I had assumed that if you made the effort to get yourself educated the world out there was waiting with open arms to use you. I was only partially aware that a depression was on, but I was so sheltered by campus life I really had little knowledge of it, and knew nothing whatsoever of its impact on women in the work world. I remember thinking it was people with very limited skills, like factory workers, who couldn't find anything to do.

But once I left the halls of academe I learned very quickly that I had a double whammy against me. Not only was money scarce to pay for professional jobs, but I was a woman trained in a man's field in a man's world. Not only was this in the days long before women's lib was heard of, but I did not have the kind of personality
to fight for my place in the world. I would much rather have hid under a log in the woods.

But I did try, for I was by nature an optimist. One of the first shocks was to take and pass, with higher grades than any of the young foresters I knew, the Federal Civil Service exams for forest biology only to be told that so many married men were out of work that my name would be put at the bottom of the list and if ever it worked its way to the top I would be assigned a job. Even in my naive innocence I knew the moment I read that message from Washington that my name would never be allowed to work its way to the top.

I sent out exactly ninety-nine job application letters, to all of the state fish and game departments, and to many of the forestry ones as well. As wildlife management was a new science, with only the current crop of graduates trained in it, several states did answer and told me I had the right mix of training in forestry and wildlife management, but they couldn't hire a woman for the job as they needed someone who could supervise men.

One day my forestry professor suggested I consider developing a native plant nursery. He had visited one in Vermont, which had given him the idea. Being a wildflower enthusiast since childhood I was intrigued with the notion. He helped me get a job at that nursery, where the idea of bringing the hardier species in from the wild and raising them in beds under shade had been pioneered. But I turned down the job offer as that was the year I was also offered the Shade Swamp Sanctuary job.
The idea of having my own nursery hung in a sort of mental limbo for several years, chiefly because the depression was still on and it wasn't practical to try to sell a non-essential product when people were finding it a problem to buy food. Besides, how could I have a nursery without land of my own? I wasn't yet motivated enough to earn the money necessary to buy land; also I was sure I would feel fenced-in if I had my own property bounds. The way I'd been living, I owned all outdoors. If it had a tree, or a wildflower, or a bird, or a brook on it, it was mine, a corner of the planet to cherish and protect and love with my eyes. I didn't want to own it in any court of law.

Eventually, however, tired of the odds and ends of jobs which kept me out of soup lines or from going home to lean on my parents, I finally applied to the Vermont nursery for a full-time job. The Second World War had begun and I thought it would be a good time to buckle down and learn a practical business, one that not only would take care of my pocketbook, but would offer soul satisfaction.

There I met a woman near my own age, who had been working in the wildgarden for many years. She, too, I discovered had been dreaming of having her own nursery but she didn't have the nerve to strike out on her own. After I was there for a year, meaning I had gone through the nursery operations for all four seasons, we decided to pool our ideas and resources and start taking steps toward our goal.

The war was on full blast now, and men were in short supply. I knew we had to work somewhere for at least a year for better than average female salary. Wisconsin, one of those states I had written to, dug my letter out of their file and asked if I were still inter-
ested, and if so, the position of State Junior Forester was open and I qualified for it. I decided to accept. If it proved to be the kind of professional job I could be happy with I'd stay with it; if not, I'd work at it for a year or so then proceed with the nursery idea. My co-conspirator, Ruth, decided to go to Wisconsin with me, and try to find a job nearby; that way we could spend free time working out the nursery plans. She did get a minor position at the University of Wisconsin, in the entomology department, which was later to be one of the surprise stepping stones to the nursery, financially.

I was assigned some real forestry tasks, like determining the growth increment of the ten-year-old forest stands planted in northern Wisconsin by the CCC in its first year. Thus I was in the field much of the year, but in winter I was in the Madison office, working on state forestry reports and publicity. As spring approached optimism grew that the war would soon end, which meant the men would be coming home and would be given their old jobs back. It soon became apparent that the state intended to keep me on but in a different capacity. The women's clubs of Wisconsin were among the most active in conservation in the nation; my superiors thought it would be just fine if I became the liaison between those clubs and the state.

I didn't see it that way. I had worked my way through college and studied forestry and wildlife sciences on purpose to find a useful way to earn my living in the woods. I had no intention of spending my life indoors with women's groups, where I'd have to keep up with the styles and go regularly to hairdressers. Just as I had learned
many things about working with men in outdoor fields, I had also
learned that few women understood field work to anything of
dressing for the outdoor life, as this was nearly two decades before
the hippies came into existence and taught girls the simple life.
In order to have women's clubs will respect what I said I would have
to conform to their ideas, not mine.

I'd had plenty of time while living in Wisconsin to consider
the options available to me for an outdoor life. Logging and lumber-
ing were out, as I wouldn't be permitted to boss men; hunting and
trapping were not my thing, for I am sister of the old wild goose,
the woodchuck, the raccoon, the squirrel. The deer and I were also
siblings. Nature-guiding in parks and summer museums was too seasonal.
Paper mills were for men only.

So I was brought smack up against the nursery idea again. I
was now ready to accept the notion of owning land. I was more than
ready to be my own boss.

The two of us had diligently saved up a land down payment.
My umbrella tent could be a roof over us the first season if nec-
essary. Once we were living on our own land, rent free, we could
find local jobs of any kind, to feed us until our nursery beds took
over our expenses.

Our land quest was for a spot not too far north, which would
make our growing season too short. Or too far south, which would
advance plants too soon. While we both favored New Hampshire and
Vermont we knew that was too cold a climate, with little flexibility.
I had a romantic notion about Virginia and the Carolinas but their
planting season would be too pushed, unless we went up into the
Appalachians and I had already learned I couldn't adjust to altitude.
That left the general region of southern New England, New York State and Pennsylvania if we wanted to be east. I leaned toward Pennsylvania as much of it is great wildlife country. By one of those fortuitous circumstances, however, which often blessed my efforts to try to live outdoors, Professor M., of my college days, had a sister in Extension work in western Connecticut. She sent us word she knew of an elderly couple who owned ten wild acres in her area which they wanted to sell but they didn't want the piece broken up into building lots. We contacted them, and were given enough encouragement so that we wound up our Wisconsin work and returned to New England. That was the spring of 1945; the war in the European theatre was winding down.

We stayed the first night with our Extension Service negotiator, as my parents had moved to Florida so I couldn't go home. When we were driven over to see the ten acres it seemed an unbelievable place; if we had made a search tour for the right spot we couldn't have found better for our needs. After scrambling through an outer tangle of prickly ash we entered the property through a mature white pine forest with a flat area with a small brook down the middle of it. From there the land, covered with mixed hardwoods, sloped up behind it, leading to a limestone rock ledge. At the top of the ledge was was a bog-like swamp. Working our way over to the north end from there we came to a small open field.

We arrived just in time to see blue and lavender hepaticas in bloom all over the ground near the pine stand. It was difficult to walk without stepping on them. On the ledges we saw wild columbine plants with buds, saxifrages in blossom, and ebony spleenwort
and walking ferns.

The highway through here, a two-lane surfaced road, led to the Berkshires if and when we wanted to go that far, perhaps on collecting trips. But for now, there was a swamp to be explored, right across the road. And only two miles to the south was a post office and a railway station. We had hoped that these services would be within at least three miles.

We were driven over to see the owners, for we had decided we couldn’t possibly expect to find anything better, or even as suitable. The elderly couple were so delighted at our decision to buy the ten acres that they brought their price down to our level. We invited them to come see our wildflower nursery at any time. Later we learned that they had turned down several good financial offers, as many prospective buyers wanted to clear-cut and sell the timber, for lumber wasn’t even rationed there was so little available. We made the required down payment on the spot, and as soon as we were able to transfer our funds from Wisconsin to the local bank we paid the remainder. It was one thousand dollars for the whole piece!

It was now our land. We could camp on it if we wanted to. We could get right at that planting which we had so long dreamed of, for it was still spring. We had ten acres of wild land to play with!

There was one more bit of good fortune, which we took advantage of immediately. Next door, to our south, was a big open meadow, and close to the road frontage there was a cluster of old tourist cabins. For cheap we rented one right away, and moved in and lived next door to our place from day one. I did have my old umbrella tent with me, but the cabin got us in out of the wet and
cold, for there was a woodburning stove in it, electricity and two
rooms. It was difficult, at first, to absorb our good luck.

Our land had a wild, untouched-look to it, though it was by
no means virgin woods. It was covered with the usual third and fourth
growth forest, common throughout the state of Connecticut, maybe only
third in this case as the pines were sixty to seventy years old. Some
of the red cedars up the slope were at least fifty years old. They
were the largest red cedars I had ever seen in New England. We saw
one lone chestnut our first day, a sprout about three inches in diâm-
eter; big enough to hope it might survive to produce at least one
nut crop before succumbing to the blight. Most of the tree cover
on the ten acres was a mix of oak, hickory, sugar maple and ash.

We might have looked more like jumping squirrels than humans,
had anyone looked in on us our first day. We hopped from rock to
rock, and wildflower to fern. We saw evidences of bloodroot coming
up, shinleaf, many varieties of violets, wind anemones, the pip-
sissewas, and many, many others. We would have to move some of them
into beds to know where they were, to "tame" them for filling orders.
What had seemed so difficult from Wisconsin, now lay in the palm of
our hand. The only hurdle left was where to find jobs to tide us
over until the nursery could support us.

There was much to do, in developing a nursery. In fact, there
were years of work ahead of us. As Professor M.'s sister asked, "How
do you know where to start?"

As I mentioned further back, Ruth had been doing some work in
the University of Wisconsin entomology department which became very
useful to us with our nursery. With so many men, especially those
graduate student age, away at war, experiments with crop spraying to learn controls of various insects had gotten far behind. There was enough help to do the spraying and collecting of the killed insects with nets, but not enough to count and record the insects in hundreds upon hundreds of vials. It was a tedious job but had to be done; Ruth had been working on them just before we left there. When they learned she was returning east they asked if they could mail shipments of vials to her so she could finish them up in her spare time. We both had decided that was a good idea, it might feed us for awhile.

So now, on rainy days, and at other odd moments as early in the morning when waiting for some of the dew to dry off, we sat at the table in our tourist cabin, and, after washing the formaldehyde out of them, we spread thousands of little insects out on paper old newspapers to dry them, then counted them. With common laboratory teasing needles it was easy to move them around, say ten to a clump. As we had hoped, it was thousand of little dead insects which brought in food checks our first few weeks.

Most of the trees on our place, down on the flat area near the highway, were far enough apart to allow ample space for beds, yet they were close enough for shade. It was almost as if someone had thinned the woods in anticipation of our work; very few were the trees we had to cut down. The flat, rather open area extended over to the small brook, and though at first we feared the soil there might be too acid be use of the pine needles, we soon discovered that the acidity was modified by a limestone underlayer. The wonder was that the pines had thrived there.
The only tool with which we had to work was a pair of clippers. Back home in Vermont Ruth had a good shovel, a spading fork, and other tools, but we had sold our car back in Wisconsin to get enough for travel back east without dipping into our savings, so we couldn't drive up to Vermont for the tools. In lieu of a pruning saw we borrowed a jigsaw from the cabin owners. But it proved useless. We must have had an overabundance of optimism to tackle a forest and turn it into a nursery with such a miniscule tool outlay. In addition, our muscles were soft from a winter of indoor work, and we suspected we were weaker than normal because of our vegetable diet due to wartime meat shortages.

One day, however, in desperation, we decided to spend two precious food dollars for a pruning saw. This small saw, with a slightly curved blade and handle, is designed for sawing off small branches. In using it you cut upward from underneath first, close to the tree trunk, then finish the cutting by going down through to the undercut from above. That way, if a branch has much weight it does not peel down the tree bark when it falls; if the bark does pull down then the cambium is exposed, which could kill the tree. I had done much pruning in my forestry work so I turned this new saw over to my partner who needed practice with it. "Cut as close to the tree as possible," I cautioned her; "else you'll leave a stub which can produce a bad knot. And the cleaner and closer the cut the easier for the tree to grow scar tissue over and around it to cover it up against insects and diseases."

Now that we had a pruning saw, plus a clippers, we were in business; in no time we had piles of brush which could be burned in some open spot on a rainy day. At last the nursery part of our
forest was passable and easy to work in.

We borrowed a shovel from the cabin owners to start digging up our first beds, for we were impatient to see what the digging would be like and what kind of soil we would be contending with for the next several years. It could be problem soil, which could slow down all our work. We were elated, however, to find the soil to be in a rich, friable condition with a good top humus layer of several inches. But some of the soil was only a foot or so deep before we hit crumbling underlying limestone. But near and under the pines there was a layer of lightly-acid soil on top, formed by years of decaying pine needles; as elsewhere, though, there was sweet soil underneath. We soon realized it was this combination which the hepatics liked so much. With proper and easy manipulation, we could have beds of sweet, neutral or acid soil plants.

Before we were through digging the first half dozen beds, which work we were slow at, being soft and not properly nourished, the next insect-sorting check came through. With it we bought a long-handled shovel, another pair of clippers, a second praxz pruning saw, so that each of us had one, and a rake. It's strange how easily you can feel rich when you have just been at the nadir of poverty. But we did have to live on beans and rice more often than we liked, and went pretty much without dessert except for the cheapest cookies. Until the next check. We took more rest periods, to count more insects, so our next check would be a bit bigger.

Digging a bed, and cutting through even the smaller roots of the trees, sometimes using the outer curved tip of a pruning saw instead of the clippers, was hard work. We left the larger tree roots intact for tree anchors, and I knew that the smaller roots
remained down under them, as well as myriads of roots between beds, so we didn't excessively interfere with the ability of the trees to take up moisture and soil nutrients. We tired easily, at first, and had to sit down frequently on the pine needle carpet.

Gradually we worked out a system. One of us would dig with trowel or shovel for awhile, as the other sat on a burlap bag or a small board and shook out the roots and weeds. Then we'd swap jobs. That way neither of us was digging too long. I'll never forget how it took us six and a half hours to dig the first bed. We had over a hundred to go. But, rather than risk one of us getting ill, or a hernia, we took long noon hours, during which we counted insects. Then back out to the digging, and quit at four.

"Wow"! exclaimed Ruth our first day's end; "at this rate we'll be three seasons digging beds. We'll starve before the plants can get going and earn us something."

But gradually, inexorably, we produced a few beds. Then came a long rainy spell, holding up our outdoor work. We made fast progress, however, on the insects. With so much time put into them the day came when we finished the bugs. We were glad to get rid of them, although we had been very grateful to have them. The last check from them was larger than usual and we used most of it to fill our kitchen shelves to make sure we had enough to eat for awhile.

The rain dwindled to scattered showers. We put on our boots and raincoats and explored the woods and swamps around us, to find out what grew there, and to learn where to obtain permission to collect. During some of the rainy days, after the insects were
all shipped back to Wisconsin, I spent many hours pecking at my
typewriter, inventing stationery heading, formulating announcements,
starting a card address file, writing to wholesalers for their price
lists and to state and federal authorities to obtain shipping laws
and collecting permits. A price list had to be made up, and there
were envelopes to be addressed. We had no money for printing, so
all our first announcements were typed individually; mimeographing
looked too impersonal and zeroxing had not yet been invented.

We didn’t expect to do any business our first season. In
fact, we preferred not to. We wanted to keep collected plants in
a bed for at least one growing season, two if possible. We wanted
to start seedling beds right away, as they would take three to six
or seven years to reach blossom size. For about three years the only
plants which would be mature enough to sell would be collected or
bought ones. We wanted to get onto a seed-to-mature-plant rotation
as soon as possible to wind down the need to collect. If the soil
were as good as it appeared to be we would soon be producing wild
flowers faster than nature, for they would be thinned out against
crowding, and they’d be watered if necessary. With all this in mind,
we worked like driven slaves every day, to make it all come to pass.

By mid May we just had to find ourselves a job somewhere;
either both of us half time, or one of us full time. We had been
dilatory about getting around to it, hating to be away from the
nursery work at all. But we were fast coming to the end of our
Wisconsin savings. We now needed a wheelbarrow, a bow saw, an axe,
wooden labels, flat nursery boxes and baskets. And we needed a big
bunch of postage stamps. We knew we should be buying in some plants
from wholesalers, but we didn’t dare part with that kind of money yet.

At the north side of our property, up the road, there was but one house on our side. It was on the corner of a valley road which ran due east down below Canaan Mountain. We had been told of an herb farm about two miles down there. One fine May morning, hating to turn our backs on our own place, we walked down there and applied at the herb farm for half time work. Just like that, we were both hired! Our goodluck hadn’t deserted us. We started work there, the next day, mornings. That gave us afternoons and evenings until dark to do our own tasks. Now we could eat and stay in the tourist cabin as long as we wished.

One afternoon when we were cutting out some of the pesky prickly ask along the edge of the highway we heard a woman’s voice call out, "Yooohoo girls, where are you?"

We had no idea who it was but we rushed to the rescue so the woman wouldn’t tear herself and her clothes on the prickly ash, for we could tell by the noises she was making she was floundering in it. We caught up with an older woman whom we had never seen before. She introduced herself as a prospective customer.

"I have a rock garden with many wildflowers in it," she said. "We heard about you so we came to see if you have anything different, that we can buy right now. How do you get in here, anyway?"

Our first customer, I gloated inwardly. If only we had something for her that she didn’t already have. Real cash she’d give us.

"My husband is out in the car." She led us out to him. He was an old man, slouched down in the passenger seat, a partial invalid.

We quickly explained that we were just getting our nursery beds cleared and hadn’t planted much of anything yet. "We don’t plan to
sell anything until next year," I said. But a brief conversation with them indicated they had all the local species anyway.

During the conversation with the old man my partner forgot a promise we'd both made not to mention a wildling we had most unexpectedly come across on our place, wild purple clematis. When she said these magic words his face lit up. Ruth said later that she assumed he'd never heard of it and wouldn't be interested. But his face glowed with delight. He said everything he could to get us to part with a small plant of it. We were reluctant to sell any of the half dozen or so that we had found, wanting to wait until we learned how to propagate it. He insisted he would pay us, and we were both enchanted with the idea of a first customer our very first year, before we even had a road sign up.

Ruth signalled me she was willing to sell one of them, so I shrugged my shoulders. She went up the hill through the woods with a trowel and a cardboard box while I entertained our guests by the roadside. Little did we know then that he was a wealthy retired railroad tycoon. They had recently come up from Long Island to their summer home in Sharon, a small town to the west of us. His chauffeur usually took him out for a ride but this was his day off so the wife was at the wheel.

When Ruth came back with the small wild vine it was heartwarming to see the old man's face as he beamed at it. We haggled over naming a price. Or, rather, since we'd had no intention of selling a purple clematis, as it isn't listed in any of the trade journals it being so scarce, and because we hoped to eventually sell it in pots, we had no idea what to charge. We didn't dare name too high a price, nor did we want to undersell it for it was obvious
this man could pay well for it. Frankly, I was hoping he would
give what to him would be a tip, about five dollars.

The sweet old gentleman hemmed and hawed, said "Bully" every
time he looked at the dainty plant. Finally he said, "Would fifty
cents do?"

I glanced at my partner, and she at me; we both looked at the
ground and scuffed our worn shoes in the roadside dirt. "Do you
think that is enough?" asked the old gentleman? Quickly I said
"Sure. Of course," now that I knew he belonged to the days of keep
the slaves in their place. "If it's worth fifty cents to you. We
aren't really in the selling business yet, you know." While my
manners may not always be what they should be, they are almost always
better than my business nerve.

A week later, by which time I knew what he was, the old rail-
road executive was back again, this time with his chauffeur. "The
clematis is still alive," he crowed. We were thankful to hear that.
If it had died for fifty cents we would have learned an expensive
lesson, conservation-wise included.

"I am afraid I didn't give you enough for it," he said. Before
I realized what he was up to he put a second fifty cent piece in
my hand where I was holding the car door open for him. I tried to
give it back to him, as it really was an insult. But, following
proper amenities, I said meekly, "You don't have to do that." We
both would rather have made a gift of the plant to him than to have
him so under-rate us and a purple clematis. But, the extra fifty
cents was ours, and we had use for it. Wild plants were then selling
at three for a dollar. This one, though rare, was one for a dollar.
We could only accept circumstances.
As it turned out, we earned many dollars by landscaping this old man's estate, mostly expanding his already large rock garden. Thus our good manners led him to trust us, which might not have been the case had we made a fuss over that first fifty cents. He paid whatever bills we submitted, no questions asked, so we not only got back what was due us on the clematis, but from time to time we earned our living off his estate.

Eventually we became so proficient at digging flower and fern beds that we reduced the time to creating one bed per half hour, or, at worst, three quarters of an hour if the roots proved difficult. Our muscles toughened. The meat shortage still bothered us; I was well aware of the existence of vegetarians in the world and knew of explorer Steffanson's experiment; he ate nothing but animal products one year while doing strenuous work in the Arctic, and nothing but vegetable products the next year. Medical tests both years showed no noticeable changes in his physical condition. But I wasn't versed enough in diet balancing to dare try to be a vegetarian on purpose. Ruth and I were the same height, five feet four inches, but she was a little more solid than I, being about 127 pounds to my 115. But we both maintained our weight, no matter how hard we worked.

During late summer, a friend of mine with four children, who lived near Cape Cod, was expecting her fifth child; she asked us to come babysit during her hospital confinement. We accepted, as it would force us to rest from our strenuous labor, and because we knew that the meat ration books in a family that size meant we would have meat every day. That proved to be true. We returned from that vacation,—playing with and cooking for four kids was a breeze compared to what we were used to—ready to tear the world apart and
WILD GOOSE
Sherwood

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put it back together again. Whether it was the change in our routine, or the meat in our diet for nearly ten days, we couldn't say. Maybe it was both. For we had escaped the herb farm chores too.

By the time fall rolled around we had several beds ready for wild plant occupants. Fall is one of the two major collecting and planting seasons, spring, of course, being the major one. But we had been too late to do much planting in the spring. In the fall, the winter buds are all formed as a result of summer's chlorophyll work; buds and roots become dormant. Fall, however, is a dangerous collecting time in the woods because hunters are out there. To walk through woods or over fields at that time is to anticipate crossfire. But we had little choice. Time was important to us, and fall, with its bounty of wild seeds, and going-to-sleep mature wild plants, comes but once a year.

fall

When we went/collecting we put on our brightest clothing, mostly red and orange, and we were deliberately noisy. We explored the woods within a ten mile radius of us, except we didn't go up Canaan Mountain as we wanted to scrounge among rocks and that is one of the few places where rattlesnakes gather for the winter. When out in the woods we talked loud and sang songs. We thrashed around in the underbrush. When we acquired a car, as we eventually did, we blew our horn to announce our presence, and roared our motor. But whenever we did hear a shot we ran like scared rabbits to the car and loudly blew our horn.

We collected most of the commoner but popular wildflowers, wood betony, Jack-in-the-pulpit, bottle gentian, turtlehead, red and white baneberries, cardinal flower, great blue lobelia, the anemones, and cowslip; also many ferns such as cinnamon, maidenhair,
interrupted, evergreen wood, Christmas, and the maidenhair and ebony spleenworts. We added more walking ferns to those already on our ledges.

Being a conservationist at heart, as well as by training, I modified the old adage of "Take some and leave some," to "Leave more than you take." In cases where there were seeds present as well as the parent plant, as with blue cohosh, the baneberries and the Solomon seals, I poked half the seeds into the ground with my thumb, and pushed soil in after them, for the parent plant had already proven the habitat to be suitable. This prevented chipmunks and wood mice from eating them all before some could germinate. Then I collected the rest of the seeds. I never felt I robbed the small animals of food, for their choices are many, including the seeds of weedy undesirable plants. What I took wouldn't affect their lives yet, as far as the plants were concerned, I was a Johnny Appleseed.

For the acid soil plants we prepared special beds since some of them were too acid-demanding to tolerate limestone subsoil. We had gradually, over summer, collected pieces of rotted pine and hemlock stumps, and buckets of rotted pine and hemlock needles and oak leaves. These we broke up and added them to the soil already present. We hemmed in such beds with cedar and pine logs to keep the prepared soil from washing out in heavy rain. In these beds we planted such species as partridgeberry, arbutus, clintonia, goldthread, and wintergreen, also a few of the ferns. They all thrived for us as if Nature had put them there.

Some species, such as pink ladyslippers, which want acid soil, also must have the right soil organisms present, such as *Mycorrhizae*, with which they have a symbiotic relationship through their roots. If the required organisms aren't present, the plants will gradually
Arbutus is in this class for it has a symbiotic relationship with a soil organism. If we could get arbutus established so that it was growing happily we would sell it. But we agreed never to sell pink ladyslippers as most people can't keep them alive more than two or three years, and even then, they don't blossom their final dwindling years. To sell them is to doom them to an early demise, before they produce seeds.

Occasionally someone with a chip on their shoulder, or who did not know of our self-conservation discipline, came to see us to tell us off, or wrote us a caustic letter, telling us we were vandals for collecting wild plants. I had patience with them for it was comforting that some people do care. But I knew my feelings in this matter were even stronger than theirs. I was satisfied that our work would produce more plants than nature and that we were increasing the number of stations where they existed by selling them. Most states issue permits to nurseries for collecting, knowing that such cultivation increases the number of plants faster than nature does. We met state rules because we were propagating, reproducing, not destroying. We did look forward, however, to the day when little collecting would be necessary once natural reproduction in our beds was established.

In fact, native plants brought in from the wild are put into chosen, suitable habitats; in nature it is left to chance. In nurseries seeds are not hung up on weeds or on forest floor leaves; they are not wasted on dry sand or clay or in too-wet spots. They aren't washed down brooks or wasted by floating on ponds or lakes. In beds they are weeded, and when necessary they are watered. All of which means that a far greater percentage of wild seeds germinate in
protected beds or flats than in the wild. They aren't flooded or blown away, or eaten by woods mice.

The cleaning off of the land in the past two to three hundred years for farming, house building, road construction, and more recently for malls, wiped out miles and miles of the original wildflower and fern plants and their habitats. Many people are now realizing this loss. Restoration of indigenous species has become a hobby of people owning otherwise too trim yards. Groomed estates are sacrificing some of their sweeps of lawn to restoring native plants.

Think of the wild plants lost where there are 2000 homes in a building lot project. Bulldozers have reigned too long. I now not only rescue plants from in front of the machines, but I help people put back what was ripped out. Most bulldozers are used to level the land, and to remove large rocks. Wildlings can easily be replanted if this damage was done in a housing development. Not, of course, where there is a mall and all is covered with cement.

Helping to counteract this great tragedy of bulldozed earth, is the mission of the wildflower and fern nursery. While some comments are made these days in newspapers and on TV about losing acreage to food production, not a word is ever said about the wildflowers and ferns which vanish under the heel of progressing civilization. It doesn't need to be true that wild plants can only hope to hang on in parks and nurseries; every yard which will grow grass can nurture wildflowers and ferns, though some might need a few shrubs and a tree or two to provide some shade.

In fact, folks with suitable yard habitats, or where such
habitats can be created, almost have a duty to take in and protect these wild gifts of nature. Wildling nurture in yards must compensate for the vast expanses of earth now smothered with concrete, buildings and road surfaces. After all, these native plants were here first; we are the intruders, the destroyers.

On the other hand no one should attempt to raise wildflowers without taking a little trouble to learn some of the facts about them. The cultivation of wild plants is different from working with regular garden plants. It is not good conservation to go at it blindly. You can't plant wild seeds the way you do garden peas and beans, for it often takes years for them to germinate. It's best to start with mature plants, either collected on some friend's country property, or bought from a nursery. Most wildlings cannot be planted out in the sun, and their soil requirements are more demanding than those of tamed garden plants. But there are native plant gardening books, and many nurseries include directions with their plants. In general, the task isn't difficult; just different. And a beguiling challenge.

When the day arrived that we had our goal of two hundred Jack-in-the-pulpit plants in two adjacent beds, some collected, a few from seeds we had collected and germinated, we stood looking down on them, admiring the marvel with our appreciative eyes. Just a few days later we were dismayed to discover that both beds of Jacks were sick! Every plant was plastered with some kind of rust. Since at that time little or nothing had been done by way of research on the diseases of wildflowers, there was little we could do. But we did break up the Jack crowd. First we cut off the rusted parts and burned them.
Then we dug up the bulbs and moved them around to different spots, no more than four or five per spot, and the younger ones we put into a new and much smaller bed. That meant they'd be difficult to find to fill spring orders, before they were up. But it was a relief the next year to have them all appear as clean plants.

When we started the nursery I had stated emphatically that no commercial fertilizers were to be used on our native plants. But I also knew you can't keep growing hundreds of plants in the same bed every year without depleting the soil of nutrients. Plants do manufacture much of their own food through photosynthesis, but they also need certain minerals to exist.

We decided to go the compost way, which is about as natural as you can get. From day one we had piled all the weeds we pulled up, and saved all other plant debris, in a pile in a semi-shady spot. Our second year we bought several hundred compost earthworms and before tucking them into the pile, added some chicken and cow manure, and kitchen scraps. All that growing season, and from then on, we kept adding more weeds, a shovelful of soil now and then and any animal manure we came across. We sprinkled it with a watering can now and then to keep it damp enough to rot.

Gradually the worms chewed all this up and did a good job of mixing everything. We gave them an assist now and then by turning some of it over with a spading fork. The first year after we added the worms we didn't use anything from that pile; we covered it over for the winter with some cow manure, then a deep pile of leaves. To keep the leaves from blowing away, and to help keep some of the decay-generated heat in, we covered it over with burlap for the winter; that permitted rain and snow melt to get through yet the
the worms were kept warm and had enough food to chaw on all winter.

By the second spring after acquiring the worms, they had created a wonderful pile of rich, natural fertilizer, comparable to the the humus of a hardwood forest floor. We didn’t yet have enough of the compost to put a good top dressing on all of the beds, so we divided it up carefully, placing it where it was most needed. What little there was was potent, giving us healthy, strong plants.

It was too tempting to have such a compost pile on hand without trying some of it on our vegetable garden, which we had started in the open, sandy, weedy area north of the pine stand. It was almost like desert over there; the few weeds present were sparse and spindly. But it was easy to dig beds for there were no roots present, it was out in the sun, and we knew we could use fertilizer if ever it came to be a must. Our second year we had tried a few rows of vegetables there and I tried modifying the extreme soil condition by covering the rows with leaves. But the vegetables proved to be the most spindly I had ever seen or had anything to do with.

This third year, or second year of the compost pile, I robbed our wild beds of a couple of buckets of the worm compost to take it over to the millennials vegetable garden. While the vegetables that summer wouldn’t win any prizes the improvement was so tremendous over the last year that we were well repaid for our efforts. We obtained quite a supply of fresh vegetables from everything that we planted. So I spread an extra sparse bit more of the compost on the rows late in the fall, hoping to add a little more in the spring.

But the fourth year we had so much to do we decided to skip the vegetable garden; partly also because we could now afford to buy what we needed in the stores. We let the spot lie fallow,
assuming that another year, when we had caught up with basic chores, we would again raise our own fresh vegetables. One mid summer day, that fourth year, I found time to walk over there. To my utter amazement the weeds in the rows where the vegetables had been were up to my shoulders! They were husky, and dense in numbers. Outside of this great weed crop, the weeds were still sparse and spindly, only a few inches high, the same as when I first saw them. The compost had made the difference,—a tremendous proof of the efficacy of compost. I have always regretted not taking a picture of those tall weeds, and the stunted ones close by.

It was this sort of thing which impressed me with Nature’s way of running things. No one fertilizes the forest, yet it produces massive trees and great crops of lumber, with only fallen leaves, worms and other dead and live organisms in the soil. By such means nature has produced plant and animal populations for more millenia than we know about.

Gradually our wildflower and fern nursery became a colorful star-studded forest grove worthy of the wood god Pan. Seeds jumped their beds as they were spread around by wind, birds and small mammals. Species which we had brought in from all around New England now mingled naturally with those already present. It had taken a few years, of course, for this to happen. But we hadn't just stood there looking at them. We always had more than enough work to do, planting, weeding, moving, sometimes watering, and now and then having to create another bed. There were never enough hours in a day to catch up, for sometimes we had to be away on collecting trips, or landscaping all day for customers. But the little wildlings seemed to sprout up behind us, when we weren't looking.
From the beginning we had the idea of building a house some day. We didn't want to live longer than necessary in the cramped tourist cabin, handy as at first it had been. For awhile the idea of building a house had seemed a hopeless attainment, not only because of the money needed but also because of wartime shortages. The lumber glut from the 1938 hurricane was a thing of the past, it having been gobbled up by the armed services. At first we assumed we would build a garage, with an apartment up over it for that seemed the largest structure possible. The garage itself would provide work space for rainy days.

But the more we saw of our land, and the more wildflowers orders that came in, the more our imaginations were stimulated. We would look at some of our big trees and one of us would exclaim, "Why can't we use some of THAT lumber for a roof over our heads?"

But it cost hard cash to have trees felled, and sawed and planed into lumber. We discussed all the possibilities. Maybe we could cut twice as many trees as we needed and sell the extra. We even considered selling a corner of our land. But we were reluctant to cut any more trees than necessary, and we didn't want our ten acres broken up.

In late fall my partner discovered she had a thousand dollar insurance policy maturing in the spring. That instantly made the house idea seem less hopeless, for that would pay for a cement platform to set a house on. Now we studied the options in earnest and came up with a practical plan. Since nursery work is all over by early November, why not go find jobs for the winter? That would pay to have some trees felled; the logs could stay in the woods all winter and they wouldn't have sap in them come spring. When
we came home in the spring we would have enough money to have the logs pulled out to a mill and sawed into boards.

We had already heard of a local builder who would be just the type we needed. We hurried off to discuss our ideas with him. He invited his wife to listen in, as she knew much about architecture and knew about inexpensive designs. "In the spring," the builder said, after that insurance money comes, and you have the sawed lumber stacked on your place, put all your assets into writing and take it to the nearest bank. I don't think you will have any trouble getting a mortgage, for no building is going on today for want of lumber. They will want your business."

"Will the lumber be too green to use it next summer?" I asked.

"Shucks," our man answered. "All the old colonial houses of New England were built of green wood and many of them are still standing. Colonists didn't have time to sit around and wait for lumber to season. There are a few tricks to it, like not putting shingles on until the boards underneath are dry. Finding outside sheathing will be the biggest problem. None of it is available on the market right now; your lumber can't be used for that. But we can cover things with tar paper for awhile. But it will be nearly a year before we reach that stage; maybe some sheathing will turn up by then, now that the war is over.

For design we settled on a hip-roof structure. That would permit us to finish the downstairs while leaving the upstairs for storage, until we could do something about it. The design would fit into the landscape. Its shape and casement windows would put us in the colonial design class, yet be the least expensive.

The man whom we now pompously called "our builder" determined
how many board feet we would need for uprights, sills, roof sheathing and other structural timbers. I got out my forestry log tables and made an educated guesstimate of how many trees would have to come down to supply this footage. I chose the five largest white pines on our land as they were each over a foot and a half in diameter; in fact, two were close to two ft. d.b.h. They were mature trees, if which if not harvested, could soon develop heart rot.

We selected the largest of the 11cedars, though I neglected to keep tally of how many. Most were at least a foot in diameter, and fifty to sixty feet tall, large for cedars. Only one tree, a white pine, was selected for cutting near the nursery so our general woodsy appearance would not be affected.

An old logger lived in the area, who had been recommended by several people. He was skilled at dropping a tree without damaging its neighbors, and he preferred part-time jobs. When my decision was made as to exactly which trees to cut we sent for him. I took him on a guided tour of our property, showing him the lay of the land and pointing out which trees were to be cut. I marked the cedars as there were so many and they all looked alike, but I didn't mark the distinctive pines as all but one were up the slope where there were only a few so large. I explained why each of the four pines up there were chosen and he seemed very understanding.

We were still working at the herb farm at that time, and pinching pennies tighter than ever to pay for this tree felling while trying to have enough left for transporation to wherever we decided to work for the winter.

One morning in late fall, the owner of the herb farm called
us off our work to her office. We wondered if she had found winter work for us. "I hope our tourist cabin isn't on fire," I mumbled. It had to be something unusual.

Our employer said, "You girls had better go up to your place right away. Someone is in there cutting trees; they have cut a big pine on your neighbor's land. Your neighbor is quite upset." We were two very puzzled people as we hurried up the road. None of the trees we had chosen was anywhere near a property border.

Our neighbor was waiting in her yard for us, with a disturbed scowl on her face. We had met her but briefly in the past. We had intended to lean over backwards to get along with neighbors.

"Our men are on your property?" I asked with dismay in my voice. She just nodded. She went with us and we scrambled through the woodland tangle together at the back end of her property as she led us to the dastardly scene. I hastily explained to her what we were doing and that we had taken the man in charge around and showed him each tree to be cut. "Not one of them was anywhere near your land," I said emphatically. "He is supposed to be an experienced woodsman so I can't understand why he came away over here."

"Well, they were cutting trees on our side until I stopped them," she stated firmly. The men were not in sight, but she showed us a big, felled pine which was not in our woods but in hers. The top was so large it almost extended over into our woodlot. "My husband won't be home until Saturday. If he were here he probably would have stopped them in time." We just stood there, aghast!

As we walked around the big leafy top toward where we could now hear chopping, I said, "We'll make any restitution you wish; we will either pay you what you consider the timber in your tree..."
is worth, or pay for having it sawed into boards for you if you can use the boards, or you can sell the boards.

She was silent all the way to the loggers, except to say once, "I don't know how you know where you are going." I was in no mood to tell her I knew every rock, every land depression and rise, every tree group. The men stopped their work as we approached. I questioned them, as kindly as I could, in front of her.

"How did you happen to cut a pine at the bottom of the slope instead of up on this hill?"

"The bottom? So that was it," he exclaimed, his old face very worried-looking. "The pine was the right size so we went ahead and cut it. We forgot all about property boundaries over there. He apologized so pathetically to our neighbor that I interrupted him, for what was most important now was that she could see we had not done that cutting of her tree on purpose.

"I'm taking all the blame," I said. "It was my fault for not marking the pines. We will find some way to repay our neighbor so don't you fellows worry about it. You are in the right place now. Just stay on this slope, except for the one big pine down among the nursery beds.

Ruth and I suffered some qualms as the week-end drew near, as it would be our first meeting with her husband. But Saturday morning we dutifully trotted over to see him. His calm, jovial manner as he came out of the house was a relief. He'd had the advantage of hindsight as his wife had seen for herself the incident was a mistake, not deliberate. With a generous wave of his hand he said, "Forget it. What's one tree in my life, when I have so many. You girls have that tree sawed up into lumber and add it to the pile for your house as
as a contribution from me. How about a little drink?" We passed up the drink but nevertheless almost staggered down the highway to our entrance with the joy of such a happy solution to our first offense against a neighbor.

About a year and a half later we felt we had reaped their kindness, when, on a blustery winter day, their house was on fire. A stranger stopped in off the road and knocked on our door to tell us smoke was coming out of the roof of the next house up the road, but he couldn't find anyone home. We went tearing up there to see our lady neighbor getting out of a local farmer's truck. She had not gone for help; we learned her phone was not working as the wire had burned in the wall.

The local fire department arrived a few moments after we did. The electric wire to their well pump also proved to be out of order so the crew couldn't pump water on the fire. People were gathering, standing around, agonizing; smoke had begun to pour out of the frame edges of the upstairs windows. Ruth suddenly hollered for an axe. A fireman handed her one and she hurried toward the swimming pool. It was supposed to have been drained; but no doubt it had collected rain water and some snow melt under a sheet of ice which covered its lower end.

The fireman instantly got the idea, and joined her hacking at the ice. By great good luck there was considerable water in it; enough, as it turned out, to save the house, using the truck pump generator.

Our second fall the problem was coming up fast, where to find a winter job. Ruth was more limited than I, never having done anything but nursery work, and most nurseries close down for the winter or have reduced staffs. We didn't want to go to
the city, though better money could be had there because we'd have to use up too much of our income for suitable clothes and costly rent. Suddenly an ad appeared in a local paper for two maids for a ski resort nearby. It was only twelve miles up the road and room and board were provided.

We made a phone appointment with the owner, and took a day off from the herb farm. A bus took us right to the front of the store where we were to meet the woman. It was a bitter cold November day. We took turns going into the store to get warm. Finally a woman drove up, about sixty years old, in a station wagon on which was the name of her resort. She was glum, almost cross-looking. We quickly walked over and introduced ourselves.

"Well!" she exclaimed, with exasperation in her voice. She looked us over, up and down, for a few moments, we in our warmest, not very stylish, outdoor clothes. "I must say I am surprised! I'm very much disappointed! You are much too old! The work would be too hard for you." She jammed a dollar bill into my hand, saying "Your fare home." She jumped into her station wagon and drove off.

We stood looking at one another, then the dollar. We stepped into the warm storm, leaned against the window frame, and howled with laughter. "If ever she saw us felling trees," gasped my partner. "And digging beds with a man-sized shovel, and juggling rocks to make a driveway." I added. "Too old," I screamed! It was the first time either of us was told we were too old, and, like all young people not yet white haired, it struck our funny bone. Would that I were that young today, as I write this. But we did feel healthy and strong as Amazons.

"Let's hike home," I suggested. "That will save us this dollar.
While we did have on woolly clothing we were dressed more for going into town than hiking on an open windy road. Both of us being rather dignified ladies, despite our occupation, we just couldn't bring ourselves to thumb a ride. So we started out gamely, for a twelve mile hike in the bitter wind. Soon we were getting chilled.

"Let's go to Florida for the winter," I suggested. "If we are going to consider maid work we might as well go where the weather is pleasant." My parents were living in central Florida by then, so the idea didn't seem too unreasonable. But they were living on a pension, so we could only visit for a short time; we would have to find a way to support ourselves. "Miami must need a lot of waitresses and maids during the tourist season," I added. "I bet we could find something to do down there."

"I'm game if you are," sighed my partner, turning her back to the wind.

Dreaming out loud about palm trees and Florida beaches helped make the bitter cold walk more tolerable. When only half way home I began to feel numb; we decided that if the bus came along we would wave it down. Just then a friend drove up to us, picked us up, and took us right to her door. When we related to her our adventure with the inn woman she said that inn catered to couples but not those married to each other. She usually hired the tough, dyed-blonde type of girls. So the woman had re-recognized two honest hicks when she saw them, whom she knew wouldn't fit into her scheme of things.

That night we made the decision to go to Florida. The next day we attended to what seemed like a thousand chores. We threw more leaves over the worm compost, checked all the wildflower beds, and
stored our tools in a friend's cellar.

The following morning we were on the Greyhound bus for Florida. We brought a bag of picnic food with us, and knew we could sleep that one night out on the bus. The fare for each was $22.00.

Though that first trip to Florida was to become the precursor of years of Florida visits to come, our stay that first year was in no way related to the story in this book. We did fortuitously find jobs as maids in a millionaire's club where we were given both room and board in addition to pay and tips. We saved diligently, resisting all the blandishments of the sub-tropics. In the four months we were there we accumulated enough cash between us to pay and for our tickets home, to pay for the conversion of our logs to lumber, with enough left over to support us a month before we had to return to the herb farm. We hadn't dreamed that such a winter plan would work out so satisfactorily.

While we were in Florida the logs had been hauled out of the woods, sawed into lumber, and stacked in our woodsy yard, and we had paid the bill before arriving back. The big task ahead now was to get a house built. What with the big pile of lumber, Ruth's insurance policy in hand, and our land already paid for, our little financial statement was welcomed with open arms, partly because it showed ingenuity and determination, partly because there was even less building going on due to increased war shortages.

If we had the courage to start creating a building in the face of shortages, said the bank, they had the courage to loan us what we needed. One of them came out to see our lumber pile, which even to us looked huge. He expressed amazement, saying he hadn't seen that much lumber since before the war. They gave us a mortgage, which
at the time seemed just right for our ability to handle it, but which in later years seemed fantastic. Nineteen dollars a month for twenty years!

We had to wait for the frost to be out of the ground before starting the foundation. That left us free for a month to collect plants in northern New England. Spring being the busiest time for a plant nursery, there were great demands on our time and energy. I learned to call April the Mad Hatter month. It proved to be the busiest spring of my life.

We worked from dawn to dark every day, wearing long sleeves against inevitable mosquitoes from the swamp across the road, or on our collecting trips. We prepared a few new beds, dry soil ones over near the vegetable garden, to accommodate a few species like birdfoot violet, and saxifrages.

Our nursery was now taking on the look of a Gene Stratton Porter novel. What with hundreds, yes, even thousands, of spring wildflowers in blossom in the beds, others carpeting the nursery woods outside of beds; there were countless hepaticas dotting the whole place with daubs of pale blue; wind anemones, trilliums, violets, ferns uncurling in the background, all added to a sense of magic. Their fragrance, mingled with the odors of rich damp soil and pine needles was enough to keep one in a constant state of mild intoxication.

In addition to our regular nursery chores, the stacked lumber had to be turned over every few days so it would dry evenly, to prevent it from moulding. The lumber being something to gloat over we willingly ignored other tasks to pamper it.
We decided to tackle some of the digging of the house foundation ourselves, once the frost was gone, to save that much on the labor bill. It wasn't too impossible, as the soil wasn't deep over the uneven limestone rockledge. We had decided against a cellar as it would be too costly to blast the rock. The site was at the southeastern corner of the nursery, an easy step over to the wild beds. We took the digging leisurely, doing most of it in the cool morning hours when the nursery was still too wet with dew to work in it. We'd have no cellar for storage, but we would have the upstairs of the house for that, and someday we'd have a garage.

By the time we were ready to have the cement poured we were back at the herb farm working part time again. By Memorial Day, however, I decided to take a better paying job, as waitrees at a first class tea room about eight miles up the pike. I'd done waitress work the summer before college, and with such bills ahead as wiring and plumbing and limited furnishings, which were not cared for by the mortgage, we needed every extra dollar we could earn. We had decided too, it was better for Ruth to stay home while the house was a-building, as there were many small ways she could help.

We had come face to face with the fact that we were seriously handicapped without a car. We explained our needs to a local garage man, with whom we had been acquainted. To our delight, in about two weeks he found an old Chevrolet with a rumble seat for a price we hadn't dared hope for. Combining the last of our Florida earnings with the last of our herb farm pay, we bought the car with cash. At last we had wings! Our builder helped us remove the rumble seat and he set a small truck body into it. For reasons I don't think
we ever knew, we promptly named it "Emma." It was this car which made it possible for me to roam so far afield as that waitrees job, and eventually it took us all the way to Florida again.

By beginning the table-waiting on a holiday weekend I came home with a pocketful of cash tips each day; that was the beginning of a summer profitable enough to tie up all the odds and ends of finances for the nursery and the building. I've been calling these remarkable bits of good fortune fortuitous. Looking back I'd say they were classic examples of serendipity.

During the wet days of early spring we had put together our first mail order catalogue. It was now in the mail. Orders were beginning to come in. Also, we'd had a sign painted with our business name, "Red Cedar Wildflower Nursery," which we hung at the edge of the highway, by our now well-cleared parking lot. Customers, attracted by the sign, were beginning to come in. Our business was now a reality, and another reason why one of us had to stay home.

The stupid, pointless war, men hunting men, was now over. But new restrictions on building materials were being declared almost weekly. Supplies were reserved for returning G.I.'s, which was as it should be. But, there just wasn't any housing siding available, which meant probably another summer in the tourist cabin.

Our imaginative builder, however, who now had much of the framework of the house in place, came to our rescue by finishing off the southwest corner downstairs, using tar paper for walls. He built a pair of double bunks in it, ran a temporary electric line in from his power saw electric supply, put in a temporary window gleaned from an old barn, and added a heavy door with a padlock, though of course anyone could have kicked or slashed their way
way through the tar paper. The dimensions of the room were smaller
than the smallest of the cabin rooms, but it just suited our needs
and
of the moment. All we needed was a place to sleep, to hook up our
electric plate for cooking in out of the rain. There was no more
rent to pay. But we did have to invest in two bunk size mattresses,
which waitress money provided us.

The brook in the nursery pines was handy; water from it was
used to mix cement when the foundation was laid. But it wasn't
good enough for household use, so we carried water from the cabin
place next door. But the brook provided enough for the wild beds.

It was a dry spring, so the brook was lower than usual. We
were worried about the slash left in our woods from the tree-cutting.
We couldn't afford to hire labor to clean it up and we were much too
busy to do it ourselves. So we acquired several forest fire warning
posters and put them up around the periphery of our property.

On my early May birthday that year I found a very useful
present on the breakfast table as near to my plate as it could be
gotten. An axe, from my partner! "From wildflower money," she

axe

stated proudly. The double bit/which I had used for splitting in
many camps in the past had been thrown, of necessity, into that
hurricane flood at the People's Forest; I'd assumed at the time it
was heavy enough to sink and I'd find it later when the water dropped
down. But I hadn't counted on the hydraulic power of that severe
flood. I never saw the axe again. Nothing could have been more
welcome than this birthday present.

June 16th was a red letter day. We picked two ripe strawberries
from our own plants which we had put in the year before near the
sand violet beds. Also, that afternoon the rough floor of the up-
stairs of our house, made with our own lumber, was finished; we
scurried up there on the ladder, and walked around in that vast, arch-ceiled room which seemed the size of a ballroom. Our builder had bought the last of the roofing paper to be found; with it nailed over the pine-board inner roof, rain was now shut out of the whole building. Our builder was so proud of having found that roofing paper that he gloated over it for days, and we helped him crow.

But then the last of the nails to be found anywhere were used up. Ruth was put to work, while I was off waitressing, hammering every bent nail that could be found. Even those came to an end so our builder had to wait for something to show up which he could use.

By now no meat was available at all. Bread could be bought twice a week. There were no eggs, no soap, no soap powder. The only canned fish available was cod and we gave that up when we found worms in one can. Worms were good protein, too, but we weren't yet THAT hungry.

In the middle of putting on the roof tar paper who should turn up but Betty, the girl of the Fenton River with the perfect curls. She had a young woman friend with her. Betty, now wearing her hair in a fetching, stunning pageboy hairdo, was at last that which I knew she could be, a licensed physician. She could remain but a few minutes as she had an appointment a couple of towns away.

The other gal, also a doctor, was left behind with us, as they had arrived in two cars. She had a slightly forlorn look about her so I impulsively invited her to stay for supper and for the night. We had arranged a cozy outdoor fireplace under the trees out back, with big logs to sit on around three sides of it. Sometimes we cooked our evening meal out there. Somehow I'd gotten the notion that this visitor might like to spend an evening by a campfire in the woods.
She could have my bunk for the night and I'd sleep out in Emma, or upstairs under the open rafters.

She sat down on the edge of Ruth's lower bunk in our improvised bedroom and looked all around—we followed her gaze for her facial expression had changed. Black walls, a barn window and a barn door, open studs and rafters, the electric plate on the floor, clothing hanging on an improvised rack at the foot of the bunks. The impeccable, highly-trained young woman smiled weakly and stepped out the open door onto the cement floor of the central-room-to-be. There were some bricks stacked on the floor by the big black shell of a heatilator where the fireplace was to be. Off to one side was an old spring couch someone had donated, on which we had placed boards. On this "bench" were our grocery supplies and dishes.

"It's very kind of you to invite me," she said, in a voice as limp as wet spaghetti, "but I think I'll go along to a hotel. I need a shower. I've been on the road all day."

She needed a shower. We could see her digging beds in the forest, pounding nails, pruning trees. But I kept still. I knew we looked like a welfare case.

"What in the world did you invite her for?" asked Ruth with annoyance in her voice after our visitor left. "We aren't ready for company yet!"

"It all depends upon the company," I answered. "If anyone ever invited me for overnight in a house still under construction I'd grab at the chance and would stay awake half the night to revel in every single unusual moment."

My partner grumbled, "Well you and a city woman doctor are two different people. This one probably thinks we are backwoods blokes."
I shrugged off the incident. My chief thoughts at the moment concerned Betty. Would she come back again? Was she still the friendly conversation list I once knew beside a beautiful trout stream? I suspected she was much more introverted now, with serious responsibilities ruling her life. Her father had warned her what medical work could do to her spirit.

She did return, several times, in the next two to three years, and proved to be still charmingly companionable. She was now living in New York City, working in a hospital there. She had a roommate, whom she brought with her, a person smaller than I but an accomplished cabinet maker. We had many nice week-ends together for the house was soon more ready for company, especially after the fireplace was hooked up. Often we brought our supper out to the woods fireplace.

We thought we had lost her for good one day, when she and her friend asked for a tree-felling lesson. Ruth and I had become experts at dropping cedars and other small trees; we could drop one on any line we chose. So we started the girls off on a medium-sized cedar at the back of the house, which we wanted removed as some of its branches brushed against the roof when it was windy. Under our supervision they made a proper undercut, facing the direction in which the tree was to fall. Everything seemed under perfect control. They were working together on a large cross-cut saw we now owned, in perfect line with the froth cut, when suddenly, the very last moment, Betty gave an extra hard pull on her end of the saw, just as the tree started to topple. That caused enough of a twist so that the tree slightly pivoted around and fell down over the electric wire which ran in to the house from the highway. If the tree had fallen where we planned it wouldn't have come near the wire.
The wire came down with the tree, very close to the girls; it fortunately had just enough slack in it so it didn't break. My partner and I realized what was happening so we jumped back, but Betty was right where she would have been touched by a live wire if it had broken. Also, either girl could have been hit by the tree jumping back off its stump, which the pressure of the wire could have caused.

There was dead silence among the four of us for several moments. Finally, Betty, looking at the sagged wire, said, "That would have been ironical, after all that struggle for a medical training."

I knew, instantly, it was dumb of Ruth and me to choose a tree so near a wire. We had so much faith in our own skill it never occurred to us that a pupil didn't have the feel of a saw and might change the pressure. We learned then and there, that teaching someone is different from doing it yourself, and I am sure that Betty learned that many times since then when teaching at a hospital.

She married a doctor not long afterwards and again disappeared out of my life, but not from my world entirely.

Another big task now hung over us. There was yet a well to be drilled. We were tired of carrying water from our neighbor's. The mortgage request had included a well to be drilled but no one knew what it would cost; even the best driller never knows for sure how deep he would have to drill. There would always be the worry of that cost until we faced up to the task.

On my waitresses earnings the \( \frac{1}{4} \) numbers had already done much work in anticipation of a bathroom and a kitchen sink. In our few spare moments Ruth and I dug out the foundation for the
for the pump house at the southeast corner of the house, and a
trench down into the woods for a septic tank field. There were so
many limestone outcroppings in the way of these diggings that we
finally had to hire a local farmer's assistant to come in and whack
at the rock with a wedge and sledgehammer. But we did bang away at
it with the sledge hammer now and then, when no one was around, just
to say we had a hand in it.

We returned to our Florida job for a second winter, as there
were still large expenses to consider, and our house wasn't yet ready
for us to live in it in winter. The expenses of the well were still
ahead of us, and if ever outside sheathing were found it would command
premium prices, which our mortgage residual might not cover. Thus we
spent another serendipitous winter in Florida, where the ocean beach
was only three blocks away and a fancy marina at a palm-lined park
was but one block in the other direction.

When we returned home we found our builder all agog over some
sheathing he had found,—just enough of it. It had been ordered by
a G.I., but the last minute, after it was delivered, he decided he
wanted to move out west. Our builder spoke for it. Even the right
nails had come with it. So our builder was back in business.

The well-driller whom we had chosen was a fascinating character,
full of tales about the earth beneath our feet. He had been at it a
lifetime, and his father had been a driller before him.

Iron was mined in the region around our nursery during the
Revolution and the Civil War, and was used in cannon and musket
making. He himself had come across many iron veins while drilling
for ordinary water, but the veins were always too small to interest
a mass-production system for getting it out. There had been talk, though, of opening up some of them during just ended World War Two, when the metal shortage had become acute. In our neighborhood!!!

It was inevitable that our driller would often be asked if he ever found gold. To my surprise his answer was "yes". He has had some of it assayed, but never found it in large enough quantity to go to the trouble of staking a claim.

The profession of well driller requires so much patience and skill it means long apprenticeship. The driller can never see what he is doing for a drilled well is never more than a few inches in diameter. He has to learn the feel of the machinery and the sounds, to know what is happening. For these same reasons it is easy for an unethical driller to charge a customer for a hundred feet when he may have gone down only twenty feet. Which was why we chose a driller known in our neighborhood for two generations.

There are two major ways to drill a well in rock ledge such as ours; by the rotary method or the percussion. In the latter a weight is lifted and dropped by a derrick, then the pounded, broken pieces are washed out of the hole by force. We didn't have a water supply to do that. With the rotary system, the drill stays in the hole and grinds away with a circular motion, the force provided by an electric connection to the machinery above. Periodically, the drill is hoisted up by the derrick and it brings with it a core of rock or soil. This is what went on at our house in the space cleaned out for a pump house.

With our limestone rock, which was very hard in many places, it was sometimes hours before a core or two in length was hoisted up out of the ground. Some water does have to be run into the hole because of friction, thus our driller brought in big water containers
to wash out the powdered part of the rock, and to cool it off.

The water only needed to be poured in; pressure was not necessary.

Our limestone cores, a uniform six inches in diameter, were mostly grayish white; a few were chalk white and a few came up that were a gray blue. All of them being proof that at one time this region was under the sea, for limestone is made of sea shells under great pressure, as well as other sea deposits.

These fascinating cores were from one to two feet long. We laid them like logs around the periphery of our parking lot. They looked like massive white worms, or grubs, lying there, but in another way they looked like fossilized logs. The novelty never wore off; as each core came up out of the earth it was looked upon by human eyes for the first time in its millions of years of existence.

Drilling is a noisy task. I was glad to be away all day at my waitress job, for it was like living with a shrieking monster. But of course Ruth had to listen to it all day. Since we were paying for that well by the foot it seemed to express our own agony as the drill went down, foot by foot. Drilling comes to an end when there is enough water encountered to suit the needs of the customer, and that is stated in gallons of water per minute. A small family can get along nicely on five to seven gallons a minute; a very good well has a flow of fifteen to twenty gallons a minute. We hoped like mad for the latter because of the nursery needs.

Artesian wells, the kind which flow from natural earth pressure without need of a pump, were once common east of the Mississippi, and they produced an abundant of water supply. But they have been adversely affected by the cutting off of forests, the development of cities which use vast quantities of water, and by poor agricultural
the water table has practices. Around Chicago, for instance, dropped three hundred feet, meaning you have to go down lower than that to bring up water.

Our driller was hopeful, knowing the rock ledges of our area, that we would hit water at the forty-five to seventy-five foot level. But came the day when a rock core came up which marked the seventy-five foot level and there was still nothing but rock bottom. Was our ledge as deep as Canaan Mt. was high, two thousand feet? Down, down went the drill, relentlessly, day after day up came the cores. If anyone had any doubts about the depth already attained all they had to do was add up the total lengths of all the cores lining our driveway.

Then suddenly, at the end of the eleventh day, the men hit icy cold water. The drill was down one hundred and fifty four feet, double what the driller had expected. The water tested at thirty gallons per minute, with no perception of interruption of flow after several hours of testing. This was cause for jubilation! Just what the nursery needed! Even though the cost was a bit scary.

"You have enough water for a small colony of houses," said our driller, who himself was relieved after the long strain. What, if after all that drilling, we had gotten only three gallons?

By the fifth summer the nursery could be called a success. Our mature plants were producing quantities of small plants, some of the new generations were already reaching blossom size. Cardinal flowers, great blue lobelia, the trilliums, bloodroot, anemones, the Solomon seals, and many others were showing up all over the place outside of the beds. Only the acid soil species remained confined inside their cedar log barriers, but they were happy too.
We had a good money order business going. Customers were stopping in every day. We were landscaping so many estates that we were now just working for ourselves. Financially we could now buy anything we needed, within reason.

But the challenge of planning, of pioneering, of creating something practical out of our woodlot, which, for me, had substituted for intellectual activity, no longer existed. By the seventh spring the nursery was hum-drums routine and had become commercial. The wildflowers were now too tame. The house was full of pushbuttons. Customers came and bought and quibbled over prices or returned good which they damaged, just like in any store. I became bored with success. The challenge was gone.

My partner was contented. The nursery was her whole life. But there were other worlds out there that I wanted to conquer. I had long wanted to study birds, animal behavior, ecology and marine biology; these were sciences I wanted to brush up against, and be useful in them in some way. I needed to know more about the sea, and the structure of this planet on which I lived. I wanted to delve into the mysteries of outer space, and to get into some kind of basic research in both indoor and outdoor laboratories.

Our wildgarden was lovely. It was a woodland Eden. But its world had grown too small. Paradise was a vast place, with more niches than I could possibly explore in a lifetime. I must be on my way.

As compensation for losing a partner, and to spare her from extra financial burden of having to pay me my share of the property and business, I legally deeded my half to Ruth. A local friend was to help her with the bookkeeping, the nursery was earning
enough for her to hire part time help with heavy physical labor, and her mother, in need of a home, having sold her Vermont one to help a family member, was available to come.

I returned to college, free as the birds I wanted to study, free to find my way along other paths which were luring my inquisitive spirit.