

End of Drought

By Gail Grenier Sweet ©2003

It's August. I'm walking outside after a two-day deluge that broke weeks of drought and 90-degree heat.

A rural editor I used to write for once wrote me: "Seven and a half inches of rain and two months too late for our crops."

On the land belonging to Community Memorial Hospital, someone has planted tall yellow wildflowers along the walking path near a detention pond. The pond was full of gushing water yesterday, during the storm. Today it's just very wet grass with a few puddles. The yellow flowers nod gaily along the now washed-out path. The sun pushes through the clouds. I can't believe I'm glad to see the sun again.

Years ago, before the hospital added buildings, this area was covered with uncut grasses and purple coneflowers. I miss that wild look but I like the path. So do lots of hospital workers and neighbors.

I'm walking with my nephew, Tyler, who turned six yesterday. For a while, Tyler held the leash for my old dog, Maggie. Now Maggie walks with me because Tyler is busy handling his lightsaber ("lightsaver," as Tyler pronounces it). He's attacking Queen Anne's Lace. Many lacy heads have rolled under the swing of his saber.

Queen Anne's Lace has three stages. The first is the flat stage, where you can see a little purple spot in the middle of the lace — dried blood from when Queen Anne stuck herself with a needle while she was making lace. In the second stage, the lace begins to curl at the ends to form a bird's nest. In the last stage, the bird's nest curls up completely and forms a ball. In the fields we pass, I see all three stages of Queen Anne's Lace — a sign of fall.

Tyler and I spot some worried killdeer scuttling along the grass on their invisible little legs. "Can't they fly?" Tyler asks.

Killdeer can fly. Queen Anne's Lace can predict autumn. Little boys can decapitate wildflowers. Old dogs can bear two-mile walks. Hospital heads can create detention ponds, plant wildflowers, create walking paths. Farmers and nonfarmers can somehow get through drought and heat and deluge.

And life goes on.

The End

[This appeared as a column in the Menomonee Falls News.]

