

## Sample Journal

I have always found the garden to be a wonderful escape. I have never wanted to storm through the wooded brush or crush the pansies; when I head into the garden it is to escape from the trials of a day in the life. There is something about an open field, the woods, and even the flower fortress of a cultivated garden, which has a calming effect.

When I go into the garden it is to escape from me. Humanity is absent in the deepest reaches of the garden. Ants carry the remains of seeds over the dark earth as shades of green leaves filter the light overhead. The bees crisscross the air with their heads full of calculated missions. The flowers open into the day. The trees bend and sway to the tune of the wind. The garden is a place to step outside myself, if only for a minute – a place to see the world around me in a natural light.

In those minutes, I don't think about how the *Helianthus* has grown tall, or how leaf structures are influenced by light intensity, or how flower morphology has evolved in relation to plant pollination. In those minutes I don't think in human terms in order to describe nature. There is simply an essence that exists in nature's own terms which is best expressed outside of human definitions. Definitions of nature serve a functional and scientific purpose, but they reduce the sensation. Using man-made definitions to describe nature would be like relating the turmoil of an airport terminal with the solidarity of a field of flowers. One gets a feeling of "nature" -- but not a feeling that *is* nature. Why do we often turn to poetry to express the natural world around us? Perhaps in an attempt to capture an essence of nature that human language might otherwise miss.

Even in the complex of natural biological processes ongoing in the garden, there is a simply purity to natural areas. I can walk out into the woods around Ithaca and forget for a moment the assignments due the next day and everything else on the to-do list. I can forget the rush of humanity and catch a glimpse of a calmer and steady world. Even if science can spell out nature in human terms, so much as to give it an air of complexity, I usually aim to forget the man-made details while in the organic space of a garden.

In the garden I am an observer first and an actor second. I live to see the garden come to life. I walk through the woods to see nature alive, and I push through the fields, grass brushing aside my legs, to feel that very sensation. I lose myself in the sea of green, and find at that instant I am not so much overcome by the demands of humanity.

Certainly there are actions which follow with observed feeling -- demands of a flower garden to be weeded, or a wooded area to be pruned. But these actions reflect a desire to recapture or perpetuate the feeling of the garden. When I work in the garden it is to create a sense of the garden. The garden can also serve a human purpose, such as the garden space my brother and I use to grow cut flowers to sell. However, for me, this is more an excuse to justify our expense in human terms (justify purchasing all the seeds) than a reflection of a desire to turn the garden into a wholly human enterprise.

Nowadays, here at Cornell, garden areas serve as placed for stress relief from the workload, an escape from the nine to eleven, an escape from human-demands. The

garden is a sanctuary for life outside the human realm, a place to see wildlife, to see nature in all its colors and forms, a place to see the world without having to feel like you're the center of it. It's a place where I can look into hard enough to step out of the here and now.

## **Sample Journal #2**

The flower bouquets that I remember most vividly are those I grew up making as a child. There were all sorts of flower arrangements in the supermarkets and florist shops, but something always appealed to me about putting together a bouquet of your own for somebody else. It was a way to show you took the time to dive into the garden, or out into the field, in hunt of the perfect flowers to round out a bunch.

In elementary school I remember going into the field across our home and wading through the sea of grass to cut the black eyed Susan, the daisy, and the goldenrod. I would wander the lengths of our property until satisfied that all the flower types in bloom had been found. Returning indoors to cut the ends of the stems once again, I would find a suitable vase in my mother's pantry and then leave the bouquet on the kitchen counter for her to find. That was the best part.

Later on, in high school, I tried my hands at flower gardening, and with a bit of entrepreneurial hopefulness, set about the idea of selling sunflower bouquets on the sidewalk, on the main street of our little town. I would plant out the packets of Autumn Beauty, Sungold, Velvet Queen, Teddy Bear, and others, and watch and wait as they grew. There was an excitement in seeing the first immature heads forming. Slowly at first, and then building up like popping corn, the flowers would open themselves up to the world. As the sunflowers exploded in rays of color, I would make bouquets, putting them in my mother's canning jars, and standing with them in town until they were sold. I was the happiest kid in the world when someone actually bought a bouquet... for three dollars. And so it went that summer, and the summer next.

In my last years in high school, I expanded into growing a wider selection of flowers for cutting, including annual and perennial flowers. I entered into a farmer's market held in the next town over every Saturday, and brought in whatever bouquets I could make the night before. It was hard work, but I liked working for myself and I liked playing around with the flowers. Nowadays my younger brother has followed in my shoes, growing even more flowers than I, and selling them at the same farmer's market. It is tough work, and a jar filled with every sort of flower imaginable sells for two and a half. But the business is justification for every seed packet we get to try the year after... when the adventure starts again. It's good, hard, fun.

I just had the chance to buy cut flowers this holiday past, the first time I had a bouquet put together for someone without me making it personally. It was the first time I put money down for flowers I didn't have a hand in growing. They were nice flowers all right, straight stems and fresh faces. They even wrapped them up with tissue. But it felt odd, like I had cheated an experience by not taking the time and thought to put together a

bouquet as I would have done back home...even though it is the winter. I paid as much as I would have for ten of the bouquets my brother and I make at home, and yet I had about a tenth as much involvement in the process. Stop, look, buy, and go. It just seemed to lessen the spirit of a flower bouquet. It is the bouquet-making expeditions that I miss the most about flower giving today. To wrap my fingers through a pair of scissors, step off the porch into the yard, to scan the gardens and fields for color, and to assemble a little spark of that color into a vase... to me, that is making a flower bouquet.