

WHERE TOO MUCH IS JUST ENOUGH

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Not too long ago I was visiting my grandkids in Ann Arbor, where I grew up. While poking around the streets there I was shocked to find that the alleys running behind the houses there have pretty much ceased to exist. Well, actually the alleys are still there, but the lush, wild, and superfluous vegetation that we still struggle to subdue here in Big Rapids (where I live now) is all but gone in Ann Arbor. They have managed it out of existence.

Now I am not talking about the smelly narrow downtown alleys behind commercial buildings where dishwashers hang out to have a cigarette. Not places like that. I am talking about the old two-track dirt alleys running behind residential blocks where the garbage truck comes down once a week. Those alleys here in Big Rapids, Michigan are still wild places, overgrown with weeds and flowers.

These same residential alleys and their kin downstate in Ann Arbor are almost manicured, so clean and neat are they. All that lush extra vegetation is just not there anymore. It used to be there when I was a kid, but now it is gone. Sure, there are some vestigial remains if you look real close, and they almost seem worth cherishing -- an endangered species!

I was not aware how much I depend on that little bit of rank wildness, the too-much-greenery that fill the alleys and byways here in my own town. Perhaps it is like the last of the last of the Wild West, the untamed, unmanageable, and unwanted, but it too has value.

There is part of my soul that lives in the excess vegetation that seems to almost pour from the backyards and trash-can areas, all that green stuff that grows out into the two-track of the alley. For one, there are all kinds of plants and "weeds" that I just love still hanging-on out there. Perhaps we have rooted them out of our yards, but they still have a life in the alleys where they can flower and proliferate as much as they want, and I want them to.

For me, the ever-mowed lawn and yard went out years ago around our home, except where the city forces us to obey, that narrow strip of mowed grass out front along the street. We have let our back yard return to whatever will grow there, flowers, and what others call weeds and natural grasses. And we now have toads, butterflies, bees, and all manner of life, where once was a flat mowed lawn that I seldom ever sat on anyway. Now I go out in the back yard and just sit in the sun among the tall grass. Sometimes too much is just enough.