

THE WILD ALLEYS OF THE TOWN

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I am a little restless these days. Hunting season is in full swing, and I can't really leave town, go out into the woods, or dare walk in the fields around here, and for obvious reasons. Our grocery stores are full of excited men, most dressed in full suits of neon-orange and red, and the rest with vests of those same colors. Worse, their shopping cards are full of beer and coolers, so staying firmly in town makes sense just now. Walking the dog for me is limited to going down the alleys of our town, about as wild a place as I can find and not get shot at. And here is a thought:

Not too long ago, I was visiting my grandkids in Ann Arbor, where I grew up. While poking around there I was shocked to find that alleys there have pretty much ceased to exist. Well, actually the alleys are still there, but the lush, wild, and superfluous vegetation that we struggle to subdue around here, is all but gone in Ann Arbor. Alleys and their kin downstate are almost manicured, so clean and neat are they. 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 close, and even they seem almost worth cherishing!

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

There is part of my soul that lives in that excess vegetation that seems to pour out of the backyards and trash-can areas and lean 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. We got them rooted 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-mown lawn and yard went out years ago. Except where the city forces me to obey, that narrow strip out front, we have let our yards go back to whatever will grow there, flowers, and what others call weeds and natural grasses. And we have now toads, butterflies, bees, and all manner of life, where once was a flat mowed lawn that I never even sat on. Now I sometimes go out in the back yard and just sit in the sun and tall grass. Sometimes too much is just enough.

Michael

