

We left the paved trail of Tommy Thompson Park to find a breezy waterside spot to set down for lunch. Though we didn't recognize it at first, the beach we found ourselves on—like the entire Leslie Street Spit—was an artificial formation, composed of clean fill and other urban detritus: torn asphalt, worn brick of rust red and mustard yellow, boulder-sized chunks of concrete, embedded with steel and gravel, as well as glass, rubber, and wood fragments, all worn round from wind and water, and softened

by the passage of time. Out of this unlikely bed, a sea of hardy wildflowers—milkweed, thistles, goldenrod, daisies, white and purple asters, lady slippers—was flourishing. This lakeside meadow, scattered with balsam poplars and willow, was typical of early-stage succession in this bioregion, both ordinary and pretty in its late summer glory.

by Jennie Barron

## Miracle on Leslie St.

I picked up a hard black object, its outline reminiscent of a loon's head, cracked in concentric circles around the eye like sun-baked wood. We passed it around and found it to be rubber, and then dropped it again on the beach among "pebbles" of aggregate and glass. Within hand-sized pieces of concrete, barely visible criss-crossed wire forms recalled fossilized fish skeletons; a tangle of rust against the backdrop of an azure lake (I swear, Lake Ontario looked azure that day) made one of us exclaim, "Look at that great *wild thicket* of rebar."

Erik began to play. Using a bent springy rebar as a launching pad, he catapulted a snake-like belt-length of rubber toward the water. It jetted several metres through the air, and we laughed at how it wobbled clumsily in flight. John took off down the beach and we turned to hear him howl as he beat with abandon on an upturned, empty, blue plastic drum. Freed of an adult self-consciousness, we played like kids, visiting the playground of imagination. John declared the Highland Games on as he swung round a concrete "ball" on a rebar "chain"; Susan built "rock" castles, and collected broken ceramics with geometric textures, suitable for pressing into clay. Erik lay face-up dreaming in the sun, beside the lunch remnants of iced lemon tea, pumpkin pie, and ripe home-grown tomatoes. I dare say we were comfortable. In our exploring, we re-arranged the landscape, took souvenirs, left traces. We did not tiptoe gently—what was there to protect? It was novel to shed that bull-in-a-china-shop feeling that I so often carry with me (for good reason) into "pristine" environments. I wished I could feel this harmless in all nature.

For the first time I can remember, faced with a literal mountain of evidence against sustainability, I had the momentary experience of not feeling afraid about our future. I wasn't burying my head or running away from the truth that smokestacks and other dirty artifacts are the props that support the lifestyle I lead: the bike I ride, the water I drink, and the university I attend, where I learn to criticize and construct anew a society where mess and loss are endemic. Face-to-face with a truly urbanized nature, one that I found compelling, intriguing, endlessly fascinating, I could not compartmentalize this experience within moral lines fencing off the "good" from the "bad."

As we left Tommy Thompson Park we ambled past the Leslie Street allotment gardens. One of us wondered aloud, "Why do people plant sunflowers? I don't know anyone who actually *harvests* the seeds." Myself, I'm willing to believe that these gardeners, like educators, are in the business of planting hope. After all, few flowers can transform themselves, in a matter of months and even in marginal soil, from seed to second sun the way this one can. Few plants speak as loudly as the sunflower about the mysterious power in that extra-human seed. And few exemplify better the comic's acceptance of circumstance amidst the earnest reaching for light. It's a metaphor I know I need.