



As our dear and recently departed friend, Roseanne Roseannadanna used to say, "It's always something." The news this week from Chateau Walrich, that oasis from free enterprise, does not bode well for the future. They came to measure the trees today and in very short order an ill wind will blow from the east, forcing us to find a new and improved version of Chateau Walrich. For those of you who have never graced us with your presence here at MASS central, that opener won't mean too much. For those of you that have, indulge me a bit so I can bring the rest up to speed.

In previous rantings I have referred to our humble abode using an array of adjectives and declaratives to paint a picture of life on the busiest thoroughfare on Long Island (no, not the LIE, the other one). To the south of our place there is the litter-infested parking lot that services the businesses that fill up the East Meadow Mall. These include a handy grocery store that offers double coupons, a liquor store that stocks the cheap wine we like, a stationary store with not one but two funny card aisles, a factory shoe store, a place that sells overpriced computers and other electronic gadgets, and a night club that attracts singles with no mufflers on their cars.

To the north of us is an often flooded out parking lot that services the office building that is directly to the west of us. Occasionally the resident gremlins in this buildings sprinkler system decide to have a little fun and within minutes the entire East Meadow Fire Department, Emergency Medical Service and half the Nassau County police force arrive simultaneously to deal with the problem. It's quite a sight and a direct threat to my horticulture.

To the east is a large, fascinating and very empty old house that started the slow, sad and inevitable deterioration of an untended structure long before we moved here. In its day this was a dandy place with lots of property, a barn-like two-bay detached garage and three wonderful 75 foot oak trees lining the west side driveway entrance. As used here, wonderful is a relative term. In the summer they provide shade and cool breezes, in the fall they provide a reason to hire a leaf raking service.

Soon after we moved here we met the new owner of this property and worked out a nifty deal. In return for allowing us to park a variety of rally equipment (trailers, MASS donor vehicles, etc.) we kept an eye on the place. It was the right plan at the right time and made MASS reincarnation a far easier affair than it would have been had we lived

on a normal suburban block. The owner never intended to fix the place up, the property was too valuable as a potential commercial entity and he had big plans.

In the ensuing three years the place has stood stoically, awaiting its enviable fate. Each season brought a wealth of surprises in the landscape. Sweet violets and tulips, iris and forsythia, azalea and hydrangea spaced their flowering to provide an almost constant array of colors. Even demon dandelions sprung up in a patchwork quilt over the back lawn area. While every card carrying suburbanite goes to ludicrous lengths to get rid of these spirited weeds, I was actually pleased that the owner lacked enthusiasm for landscaping. There was something wild and free about this place and it was our good fortune to be able to enjoy it's unmanicured beauty season after season.

Acorns were shed by the zillions from those stately oaks and scattered themselves carelessly across the driveway and our side yard. Many were scrupulously spirited away by our spunky and fearless squirrel and chipmunk menagerie as the robins, blue jays and cardinals observed from well-engineered nests positioned safely in sturdy branches. This summer a family of raccoons took up residence in the oak closest to the highway causing a momentary imbalance in the wildlife population. The mother and her two babies scamper up that tree each evening about ten and stare warily down at us as we stare up at them. TH and I speculate out loud on how they could have found their way to this last comparatively private haven in an otherwise hectic, sometimes maddening and usually hostile environment. We'll never really know, but we delight in their visits and the rest of our creatures have adjusted to their presence. When one lives in a place like this one strives for balance whenever possible!

The serenity of the house, the gentleness of the flora and the visits by unexpected wildlife have made our tenure here most bearable. But that will all come to a crashing halt soon. You see, the tree removers drove up in their white Lincoln Continental early yesterday morning to inspect the oaks. It was a lousy way to start a day since they didn't even have the good grace to arrive in a pick-up. I questioned their presence, their intentions, their audacity to no avail.

The trees are coming down, the house is coming down, the barn-garage is coming down and a paint store is going up (Silly me, I used to beef about some green liquid in the driveway!). Concrete, brick and blacktop are going to replace our extended mecca. Litter from careless shoppers will go airborne into our yard, irritating lighting will invade our windows, car doors will slam, whining children will complain out loud, horns will bleat out irritating protests and our senses will be assaulted by all the chemicals attached to that industry. It's time to go.

Packing notwithstanding, and under normal circumstances, the process of relocation tests the mettle of any relationship. While it has always been true that a woman's priorities in a house often bear little resemblance to a man's, in our case we must begin the process knowing that hard compromises are inevitable. Now, I freely admit that there may be the perfect Chateau Walrich out there somewhere but I'm real doubtful about finding it WITH A FOUR BAY GARAGE - DETACHED - WITH WATER AND 220 WIRING!

Because TH and I travel so much our routine needs in a house are pretty standard. Space to sleep, to cook, to relax, to entertain, to bathe (space and a half would be better here). It's those "other" needs that are going to do us in. What it all boils down to is an average size house with acres of property for that four car garage, etc., etc.

I like old, he wants something that requires no attention. I'd love a huge kitchen, space enough for a microwave suits his purposes. I want a fireplace, he's into the utilitarian wood burning stove. Gratefully we both agree on one thing - space. It's where the space is that prompts the debate.

In order to keep one's sanity during chateau selection I have resolved to look upon the whole experience as an adventure - a journey full of possibilities, of twists and turns, of debate and compromise (sorta like what we went through picking the colors for the MASS). In the final analysis, reality will rear it's ugly head. TH will get some of what he wishes for, some of my non-negotiables will be appeased. But through it all there is one thing we agree on without reservation - a winning lottery ticket won't hurt.