

# 'Flower in the Crannied Wall'

## Essay collection called 'an affirmation of life'

By GWEN FORBES

Longtime readers of The Eclectic will recognize the name Lydia King Frehse. She wrote the "Nature" column for The Eclectic for many years. Now she has come out with a beautiful book "Flower in the Crannied Wall." This collection of essays is, as she puts it, "an affirmation of life."

The illustrations by Mrs. Frehse's daughter, Rochester resident Rosemary Geist, are arresting — simple, accurate, perfectly suited to the straightforward, yet poetic, text.

Mrs. Frehse, a Ferndale resident, wife, mother and grandmother, testifies to her own belief in the order and majesty of creation. She has organized her studies into short, appealingly titled chapters, such as "Unheard Bird Songs Made Visible" and "Big Key on Red Ribbon."

In the former, she states, "Using an audiospectrograph which photographs sound, they (two Ohio State University professors) are able to put down on paper a 'picture' of the sounds birds sing. These graphs prove that most birds are musical gymnasts, playing tunes which our clumsy ears cannot hear in their entirety."

On the practical side, the author offers this advice to hunters and gatherers of mushrooms,

"There is only one way to avoid the certain death which lurks within such innocent looking plants as the destroying angels (Amanita verna and Amanita virosa), and that is to avoid eating all fungi, unless you are a careful student of their kind."

SHE DESCRIBES edible flowers, often the vegetable course at a well-set table, Brussels sprouts, cauliflower, artichokes.

The graphic descriptions of the teeming marshes and bogs make interesting reading, especially at a time when our own wetlands are so seriously threatened.

About Michigan's rarest bird, the Kirtland Warbler, she says, "The Kirtland's estimated population of some 1,000 birds is now being encouraged by a carefully supervised burning program which will make available from year to year their highly restricted nesting site in young Jack pines 8 to 15 feet in height."

Her book is full of surprises. For example, the Bald Eagle isn't bald. His head and tail are feathered in white, giving him, from a distance, a bald appearance.

Mrs. Frehse refers to the earthworm as a "tiny plowman." He really is, by eating and fertilizing the soil as he tunnels underground. I was also surprised to

learn that there is a distinction between male and female sassafras trees.

At the end of the section "Spring," Mrs. Frehse states, "The snail nibbles the mushroom. A roving raccoon eats the snail. The cunning fox carries off the raccoon to his den. The peck of the fox eventually comes to rest on a lady's shoulder," reminding us that we are all predators.

"Big Key on Red Ribbon," a chapter title, is a teaser. One is tempted to find a hidden meaning here. Actually, it's simple enough — the key to the family summer place at Walloon Lake is attached to a red ribbon. The key not only opens the house, but a section describing old friends — the maple, birch and pine trees on the Frehse property, and their boarders, birds and thousands of insects which also summer there.

The praying mantis should perhaps be called "preying" mantis. Her description of this beneficial insect is somewhat startling. "So ferocious is the appetite of the mantis that the female can eat a daddy-longlegs, three grasshoppers and top off the meal with her discarded mate. As autumn advances, reducing the supply of insect food, specimens have been seen gnawing one of their own legs, a kind of suicide to allay their hunger pangs."

MRS. FREHSE lays to rest the myth that the milk snake milks cows. (It doesn't.) And I was astonished to learn that there is no snake which makes a loop of itself in order to roll downhill.

But some actual behaviors are just as amazing.

For example, in a few paragraphs of tales of tails, she says that "The tail of our western gila monster serves a dual purpose; it is a pantry to store reserve food (fat) and its tip is a needle to inject venom into its victim."

A bat's tail is a cradle spread out to catch its newborn young. There is a breed of western lizard which, as protection against a pursuing snake, loops its body around the limb of a tree, grasping its tail in its mouth. There being no loose ends of the snake to bite, he looks elsewhere for a meal.

Lydia King Frehse's background in English and science, both as student and teacher, has served her well in writing this book. It's informative, easy to read and attractive. I was delighted to know of her family's long commitment to Camp Westminister. It has been my children's home away from home for many summers.

I like the fall and winter sections best, probably for the reasons she herself mentions. "One

cannot venture into the lushness of a June meadow without a sense of frustration: There are too many grasses, too many flowers, too many birds calling, too many insects humming, for us to give proper attention to each.

"But in February, winter has emptied the landscape of this crowded appeal. Now it is possible to observe the doings of a single flock of birds or to

reconcile the life pattern of a lone fox whose telltale tracks lead into a snug den in the hillside."

In sum, Mrs. Frehse's command of English and her thorough knowledge of wildlife enable her to be both factual and poetic. She knows the world outdoors. She is eager to share her knowledge and uses simple, affectionate terms to welcome us to that world.

store on Pierce Street has "Wall" for sale at \$9.95. find it at Waldenbooks in "Flower in the Crannied Rochester shoppers can the Great Oaks mall.

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