



ELLEN HERSCHER

## Poem made one Decoration Day seem daunting

**M**emorial Day is a U.S. holiday set aside to pay homage to the dauntless men and women who bravely served their country. One might think this would be a solemn event; yet, I perceive it as a glorious celebration and remembrance of happy times, with exception of one specific day many years ago.

I vividly remember my grandmother announcing that it was Decoration Day, time to get flowers with which to decorate the graves of our loved ones. The trunk of the car was chock-full of tall colorful bunches of gladiolas, carefully wrapped in wet newspaper and stacked layer upon layer. In the passenger portion of the car were buckets and canning jars filled with an abundance of flowers. Several cemeteries would be visited on that special day of commemoration.

Maybe it's because I enjoyed the flowers and sunshine that I remember all Memorial Days as clear, warm, sunny and vibrantly sunlit. For Grandma, the holiday was a serious devotional occasion, in addition to being a day of socializing with family and friends. It was also the first day we were allowed to don white clothing and wear sleeveless garments — a peculiar little unwritten rule that most of us had adhered to for fear of appearing ignorant or flagrantly tumultuous.

Wearing a Clorox-whitened blouse with lavender gingham pinfire that Mother stitched for me, I climbed into the car with Grandma, my mother and aunts. Our feet nestled among the flower containers. This was the last time I remember going to the cemetery with my grandmother before her death. If there are flowers in heaven, I am sure Grandma is tending the gladiola garden and benevolently handing out long stems of resplendent blossoms on Memorial Day.

### Bells called us

Across from the cemetery was a quaint white church with a tall steeple. With a melodious ring, the pealing bell called all of us through the open doors into the sanctuary. Besieged by nervousness, I waited impatiently for my signal to walk up to the pulpit where I would speak to the congregation. For weeks, I had memorized and rehearsed a lengthy poem that honored the heroes of past wars. My big moment had arrived. I walked confidently up the aisle, then stood beside the podium since it was too tall for me to see over the top. The pastor introduced me with a broad smile and kind words.

Linked together like paper dolls, my family sat in the front pew holding hands and proudly looking on. Feeling quite smug, I was reciting the poem eloquently. About half way through the poem, I glanced at the smiling faces of my family and noticed the shimmer in Grandma's white hair. Then the oddest thing happened. Even though Grandma was smiling, I saw a tear upon her rosy cheek. It glistened like a diamond, distracting me to muteness. Mother's voice whispered as she tried coaching me with the poem, but I had completely lost sequence and stood quite speechless. The entire congregation now looked like a black cloud of fog that had settled heavily behind my family.

Still mesmerized by the dazzling teardrop, I fidgeted with the bow of my pinfire, twisting it until it came untied. Silence pounded in my head as I searched the depths of my brain for the long lost poem. To further my mortification, I finally uttered one word — "umm," I began repeating "umm" a dozen times that it sounded like a chant. At last, my mother rescued me by coming forward and handing me the written poem. In humiliation, I finished by reading the remainder of the poem I had so flawlessly memorized.

After my last word was spoken, I quickly left the church by way of an auxiliary hall close to the pulpit, then waited out front for my mother. All the people began parading outside as I hovered inconspicuously behind a bush until I saw Mother. I ran toward her. As luck would have it, the pastor crossed our path. He stopped dead in

Please see CHAT B3

## Gardeners help this Eden grow

**■ The Warner Mansion needs volunteers to help garden the grounds one morning a week. Experience is not necessary.**

BY MARY RODRIQUE  
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A critter who ate the tops off three flats of zinnias meant for planting around the Warner Mansion couldn't sag the spirits of a group of gardeners who met Monday morning to plant annuals around the city's historic museum on Grand River.

The zinnias — originally destined for planting last Friday but delayed due to bad weather — became fair game for wildlife in

the area.

"Look for a fat, well-fed critter," joked Betti Pool, a nine-year veteran of the informal Warner Mansion volunteer gardening crew and a member of the Farmington Garden Club and Farmington Hills Beautification Commission.

"Normally we come out here Wednesday mornings from 9 a.m. until noon. We're starting to work more perennials into the garden. That will make for more easy care. The annuals bring the color. We need more help."

"You don't have to be a great gardener to help. It's a wonderful opportunity for master gardeners to get their hours in. In spring, we plant and then deadhead and weed throughout the summer. City workers do all the hard stuff. It's a good opportunity to learn more about gardening."

### Learn growth habits

"You can't have all these plants in a home garden so this is a great way to learn growth habits."

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STAFF PHOTO BY BILL EAKIN

gave the mansion to the city.

### Learn from each other

"I've always loved to garden. I come over whenever I can. I'm trying to do well with roses. We learn from each other here."

A Farmington Garden Club member, she moved to the community in 1979 and is involved with the Warner Mansion upkeep shortly thereafter.

Barbara Loughlin of Farmington Hills got involved with the gardening group through her participation with the Farmington Naturalists.

"I began in the wildflower garden here," she said. That was about 15 years ago.

"Truthfully, it's a joy being outdoors. I have a love of preserving historic places and of gardening."

She noted that many weddings are held in the gazebo on the grounds. Many prom couples and graduates also enjoy taking pictures in the lush green setting accented by flowers.

"We're helping to preserve the beauty of the city," Loughlin noted. "And also continuing to bring the community and getting to know many nice people. Gardeners are always nice people."

**Gardening expertise is not necessary to volunteer with the Warner Mansion gardeners. To learn more about it, call Betti Pool at 442-2742 or Dick Carrell at 476-6257.**

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