

Local News



Contributed photo

When a 7-year-old girl's faerie garden was stolen, neighbors surprised her with pieces for a new one.

Like magic, girl's faerie garden reappeared

'Just basking in the fact that people are still good'



ODDCHESTER
Steve Lange

Two summers ago, Olivia (now a second grader at Lincoln Elementary) and her little brother Will started a faerie garden — just a few gnomes and some colored crystals — outside their family's Slatterly Park home.

Olivia is a science kid, into hard facts and non-fiction books. But her mom's mom — they call her "Gramma Carrot" — likes to tell her stories about faeries and their secret world.

The garden slowly grew, bit by bit, tiny toadstool by ribbon-wrapped stick.

It was a fantasy escape for 7-year-old Olivia. In this year full of big things, the little things seem to matter even more.

Then, on a Saturday morning in August, Olivia's mom, Rachel, walked outside and noticed the faerie garden was gone.

Someone had stolen it in the night. All of it.

"My thought," says Rachel, a music teacher at Folwell and Churchill elementaries, "was 'One more point for 2020; one less point for us.'"

Something, though, sparked a response.

Rachel (a classical musician) texted her dad (English major and poet) and her brother (JRR Tolkien enthusiast). The three of them started writing, well, a Medieval proclamation. In verse.

"Something rotten in the State of Slatterly," it began.

"A family of faeries and gnomes/A garden of toadstools and jewels," it read in part. "STOLEN! A human girl of seven years curses you! The wrath of a human mother is upon you!"

Rachel posted it on the Slatterly Park section of Nextdoor, the nationwide app with a neighborhood focus. Didn't think any more about it.

Then came the responses.

Some were Medieval poems. Some were private messages with people's stories about how tough this year has been. And how they wanted to help someone else out.

Then came the gnomes. The toadstools. The tiny wooden benches. Items showed up overnight. The seashells and starfish placed around their tree. Fancy fake flowers. The tiny treasure chest.

Some people called ahead. "Two gentlemen and a lady contacted me to see if they could drop off a few gifts," says Rachel. "I said 'sure.'"

The men delivered tiny faerie houses and a tiny bridge. The woman — carrying her newborn, named "Olivia" — donated items from her own garden. The visitors didn't know Rachel or her family. They didn't, it turns out, even know each other. They had met in the comments section of Rachel's Nextdoor post. "We spent a lovely morning chatting, watching Liv put her new garden together, and just basking in the fact that people are still good," says Rachel.

Within a week, Olivia's Faerie Garden was filled with tiny animals. Tiny treasure chests. A faerie house with tiny working solar panels.

A small sign that reads "Gnome sweet gnome." A small sign that reads "Hope."

And — now hanging in Olivia's room — a scroll, hand-delivered by neighbors and hand-lettered "To Miss Liv, the tiny human queen of this dwelling."

"We've sent you this letter/in hopes you'll feel better," it reads, in part. "Along with some magic to add to your garden."

It's signed "With all our love, The Super Secret Protection Agency Of The Magic Faerie Garden Society."

Steve Lange is the editor of Rochester Magazine. His column appears every Tuesday.

ANSWERMAN

Quench your tree's thirst before winter sets in

As everyone knows we've had a very dry summer/fall. I'm not complaining. It's been beautiful here while we're sheltering in place. But I thought our trees, especially evergreens, are rather dry heading into winter. Would it be a good idea to give our trees a serious soaking before the snow flies? I'm looking forward to your advice, which is always stellar! — Rochester Resident with trees I'd like to keep healthy.

"To water or not to water?" That is the question that a famous writer once asked, right? No. Well, this famous writer is asking it now.

In this case, I went straight to the source as my knowledge on the subject is a little green.

According to Hunter Evans-Clement, the tree and shrub lot supervisor at Sargent's Nursery,

the dry season has taken its toll. You can see it in the leaves that have turned brown and fallen without the typical fall colors, he said. According to Evans-Clement, giving your trees a good saturation of water two to three times a week before the temperature drops will help them retain the necessary moisture needed.

"It is very important to go into the winter as wet as possible," said Margaret Hinz, owner of Family Tree Landscape and Nursery. So even after Halloween, don't put away your hoses just yet, she said. According to her, you can not overwater in the fall like you can in the spring and summer.

One other important piece to note came from Tony Zak, outdoor nursery manager at Jim Whiting Nursery and Garden Center. He said to avoid shocking trees and shrubs,

continuing the watering schedule already established is vital. Do not suddenly stop watering as this will shock and kill your trees. Instead, continue watering until the ground has frozen and trees and shrubs are fully dormant. He also recommends paying attention to the weather forecast and using common sense. Newly planted trees will need more water on a regular schedule to help establish the roots, but certain varieties (i.e., birch) will need more water even after establishment.

So when it comes to watering trees and shrubs in the fall, less is not more, more is more, and you can't hardly have too much. So give those arborvitae and maples a good drink before you tuck them in bed for the winter.

Send questions for the Answer Man to answerman@postbulletin.com.

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CORRECTION

A story on page A2 Thursday misreported a public statement by Randy Brock, candidate for the state House of Representatives, about COVID-19. Brock said that Minnesota's case count, not the death toll, has been lower than neighboring states.

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Notices are meant to be noticed. Read your public notices and get involved!



A year of things lost, but also things that were found

Today, as I write this, marks the one-year anniversary of our first day of quarantine.



ODDCHESTER
Steve Lange

It has been a year of things lost. Jobs. Businesses. Lives.

It has also, though, been a year of things found.

We found time for nightly family board games and weekly family hikes and, well, for the month we spent putting together — and rehearsing with — our “family band.”

And, sometimes, we found the positives in things that, a year ago, would have seemed absurd.

“I actually like wearing my mask in the car,” said one of our kids, “because I can sing and no one can tell.” That kid asked that I not name him or her.

It’s been a year in which we celebrated son Henry’s high school graduation — watched him walk across a makeshift stage in the Mayo parking lot — from our minivan.

It’s been a year in which we hiked every state park in a 100-mile radius. A year in which we played so much ping pong in the garage that we eventually bought \$35 paddles and headbands and started calling it “table tennis.”

We played an estimated 350 nights’ worth of board or card games, from Tripoley to Telestrations to Cut That Out, a board game that I spent months creating and then forced my family to play.

Started that family band and learned “California Dreamin’” by the Mamas and the Papas. Daughter Hadley played piano. Henry had his bass drum from marching band. I was forced to sing. Wife Lindy — and I’m embarrassed to admit this — played various shakers she made using dried beans inside Tupperware containers. Daughter Emma, 14, spent hours practicing the song’s extended flute solo. On her tuba.

We taught our old dog, Scout, new tricks. Baked bread from scratch. Finally refinished the downstairs bathroom.

I met my family at Paws&Claws, where they showed me an abandoned 13-pound chihuahua/poodle/pit bull/Doberman mix

that, when they put a leash on her, literally belly-crawled around in the grass. Brought that dog home and named her Finch. Immediately realized Finch was meant to be with us.

And we watched a community, hurting, come together.

We drove to see the Plummer Building, bathed in “Mayo” blue. To see the 24-foot star — normally reserved for the Christmas season — hoisted to the top of the Charter House. To see the lights on the Hilton Building, hand-switched on nightly to form a giant heart, 16-stories high.

We got misty-eyed at the stories of restaurants who offered food — free of charge, no questions asked — to kids in need.

Got misty-eyed at the story of the 6-year-old girl whose birthday-loving mom died of cancer in January, and whose 7th birthday fell in April, when she couldn’t have a party. Then, through her neighborhood, came the parade of friends and teachers in their vehicles and ambulances and fire trucks. And cops singing “Happy Birthday” over their loudspeakers.

Got misty-eyed at the story of the two young farm kids from Viola who, after hearing that staffers at a local restaurant had their tip jar stolen, showed up to order take-out. And to donate \$200 they’d earned selling sweet corn over the summer.

We performed our one-song concert — “California Dreamin’” — for ourselves. Graduated to overnight hiking trips through state forests.

Came home one day to find Scout sleeping on the couch with Finch, the new rescue dog, basically laying on top of her.

Realized that we probably would have done none of that in a normal year.

Steve Lange is the editor of Rochester Magazine. His column appears every Tuesday.

Are there really coyotes in a city of \$100,000 people?

Dear Answer Man: I’ve seen several social media posts warning people of coyotes in Rochester: Are there really coyotes in a city of more than 100,000 people?

Yes. Just watch for ACME delivery trucks.

Actually, coyote sightings are common within the city and surrounding areas, according to Brandon Schad, Rochester area wildlife supervisor with the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources.

“The geography of Rochester and abundant natural areas and corridors provides good habitat for coyotes and many other

ANSWERMAN

species of wildlife,” Brandon said.

The DNR has seen significant increases in the number of coyotes statewide over the past 30 years, but numbers seem to have leveled off.

In general, coyotes are shy animals and tend to avoid people. However, they are opportunistic hunters, and a cat or small dog might make a meal.

“Make sure there are not food sources that might attract coyotes (pet food, garbage, etc.),” Brandon said. “Often overlooked are food sources that might attract other

small mammals that coyotes feed on. For example, bird seed might attract squirrels, rabbits or rodents that may in turn attract coyotes.”

As for your shih tzu, don’t leave him outside unattended if there is a coyote presence in the area. If they really become a problem, your best solution might be to build a fence, Brandon said.

Coyotes are considered nuisance animals and are not protected.

The DNR web site has a wealth of information on coyotes and other nuisance animals.

Send questions for the Answer Man to answerman@postbulletin.com.

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SEEKING PARTICIPANTS 65 AND OLDER FOR A FLU VACCINE STUDY

Mayo Clinic is seeking healthy volunteers, ages 65 and above, to participate in a research study who have not yet had the flu vaccine (Fluzone High-Dose) this season and would like to receive it. The purpose of this study is to evaluate the safety and effectiveness of the study drug, entolimod, in enhancing the effects of the influenza vaccine (flu vaccine) when administered at the same time. All tests and procedures done for the purpose of this study will be paid by the research study.

YOU MAY BE ELIGIBLE TO PARTICIPATE IF YOU:

- Are 65 years old or older
- Are medically stable
- Are eligible to receive FluZone High-Dose vaccine
- Have not received your flu vaccination yet this season

Study participation will last approximately one year. You will be compensated for your time.

For more information, please contact a member of the study team at (507) 266-1944 or RSTDOMCTU@mayo.edu.



ANSWERMEN

Rochester has some land for future schools

In the 2019 Rochester Public Schools referendum, it said that the district would buy additional land for growth, but I have not heard about new land being bought or talked about. When you go to the district's website, the last time RPS updated the tab for land for future growth was in November 2019, when they wanted to build the new middle school by Hart Farms. My question is this: Is the school district still looking into the Hart Farms land? Are they looking at other properties? Has there even been any effort made by the district to buy new land?

I have no doubt there were more than a few hearts broken by the fallout of the Hart Farms land as a possible site for a school. Nonetheless, that site is no longer being considered as a future space for academic pursuits. As Taylor Swift might say, the Hart Farms land and Rochester Public Schools are "never, ever getting back together."

So why is it still listed on the district's website? Who can tell, honestly? Perhaps the district is still pining for the land in southwest Rochester and having a little bit of a hard time letting go. Maybe it has a policy of only updating its website once every decade. Your uneducated guess is as

good as mine. Still, the district is looking forward to growth in a couple other locations. According to a little birdy inside the district (Finance Director John Carlson), the district owns two locations of undeveloped land:

- "NE: 13 acres on 21st Street Northeast. The district refers to this as the 'Century Hills property.' It was acquired in 1999, adjacent to City parkland."
- "SE: 17 acres at the intersection of Collegeview Road Southeast and East Circle Drive; The district refers to this as the 'DNR site.' It was acquired in 1994; if this site is not used for a school building, it will go back to the State of

Minnesota." Carlson says that either of those properties could be used for future elementary schools. But, elementary schools are a dime a dozen, it seems. We're getting three of them out of the 2019 referendum alone. So let's take a moment to talk about a real rarity: another high school. Dun Dun Dun. "District staff and city staff are currently working on identifying areas where the city will grow in the next 10 years and where the best opportunity for the district to secure land for a fourth high school will be," Carlson wrote in email. Here is where your memory serves you well, dear reader:

Because yes, the district does intend to buy property with funding from the 2019 referendum. However, I'm told that if they can't lock in enough land for a high school, they may consider using the funding for — you guessed it — another future elementary school. Since there seems to be so much commotion with the naming process in the district, I'll go ahead and make it easy for them. I'll name this one myself: "Cheaper by the Dozen Elementary School."

Send questions to Answerman@postbulletin.com.

Nothing says I love you like a tool box

As a parent, of course, I consider my children — my wondrous, precious offspring — to be the most blessed of glorious gifts.

Why, I treasure each and every moment I spend with them as if that moment were a tiny piece of heaven forever captured inside my soul.

I would never tell them that, of course.

Instead, I regularly find myself telling them things like "The left front tire of your car looks really low. I'll just assume you're not checking the tire pressure as often as I have repeatedly recommended."

What I'm really saying is "I care about you so damn much that I even want your PSI to be correct in all four tires!"

But what they hear is "Well, if you're not going to use the tire pressure gauge I bought you, you can at least pay close attention to possible bulging of the bottom sidewalls."

Because that's what I actually say.

Every so often, though, I get a chance to try to show my "soul heaven" feelings through a tangible item.

Like ... **The Toolbox** In June, our firstborn, 22-year-old daughter Hadley, will be graduating college and starting her first real job. She will be moving, with two other young women, into a house in an historic and artistic neighborhood in the Twin Cities.

A few weeks ago, she mentioned to me — casually, in passing — that she would like a toolbox for her new apartment. Just the basics for minor repairs, that sort of thing.

I immediately hung up the phone and announced the following to wife Lindy: "Well, Hadley has now formally asked me to take on a major role in the new apartment process. Not sure of all the details, but it looks like I'll be some sort of Maintenance Supervisor with building repair and oversight responsibilities."



ODDCHESTER
Steve Lange

I'm guessing Lindy only heard maybe half of it, since I was already running out the door on my way to Menard's.

There, I spent 40 minutes comparing and contrasting toolbox options. I lifted steel toolboxes to test heft. I squished and unsquished canvas tool carrying cases.

I bought — or picked out extras from my tool collection — a hammer, pliers, a screwdriver with interchangeable bits.

Adjustable wrench, level, utility knife. Allen wrenches, scissors, needle nose pliers.

I carefully organized them in the two-level tool box with removable top tray. Put the box away. Decided I was finished.

Then, the next day, I added a small drain snake, an outlet tester, safety glasses.

I hand-picked through my jars and drawers of random screws and nails and wall anchors and put the best ones in a small plastic case with multiple compartments.

Reorganized the tool box again. And so it has gone for the past few weeks.

Packing tape, masking tape, duct tape. Sandpaper, Super Glue, small hand saw.

I eventually had to buy a bigger toolbox.

Finally, though, I got Hadley's apartment toolbox just the way I wanted it.

As a final — final! — touch, I etched her initials — HJL — on the top.

Then, over the course of the last week, added a pair of work gloves, a magnetic stud finder, and some twine.

Steve Lange is the editor of Rochester Magazine. His column appears every Tuesday.

NEWS IN BRIEF

Rochester man arrested in Iowa for catalytic converter thefts

A Rochester man was arrested in Iowa on Friday for allegedly trying to steal catalytic converters from cars.

Howard County, Iowa, sheriff's deputies were called to Lime Springs on Friday for a report of people trying to remove catalytic converters from cars there.

Tyler Jeffrey Schacherer was taken into custody Friday afternoon. Deputies executed a search

warrant for his car and found seven catalytic converters in his possession.

Schacherer was charged with second-degree possession of stolen property and fourth-degree criminal mischief, according to the Howard County Sheriff's Office.

Rochester police and car repair shops have reported an increase in catalytic converter thefts in the past year.

Catalytic converters contain valuable metals, making them attractive to thieves.

Post Bulletin staff reports

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