

Looking Forward to Gin-and-Tonic Days

By Gloria Hildebrandt

It's a cool, drizzly spring day and I've just come in from walking the dogs around the perimeter of the property. After a full day of rain yesterday, the pond overflow was running high. I saw tall grass at the overflow channel which I'd like to cut back so we can see the water better. At the old spring end of the pond,

there are some mossy rocks on the shore that I'd also like to free from tall grass.

I should explain the words "the old spring end of the pond." When my parents bought the property, there was a small, round depression where a spring brought up a steady supply of water. The farmer let his beef cattle drink here, and they churned up the earth and made it look like a — well,

like a muddy cowpond. My father had the idea to have the earth excavated here to make a big, natural swimming pond. Once that happened, and we were swimming in it, we discovered that there are a few more springs in the pond. And one is even warm. You can swim from the cold spring to the warm spring. How and why there's a warm spring in the pond remains a mystery. But these are the new springs, as opposed to the old spring.

But that's how my walk went, with me noticing all the things I should do, could do, to make me think I'm improving the place.

The rain has turned the back acres into wetland, as happens every year, and as the frost is leaving the ground, the paths form air pockets beneath, which sink suddenly when you step on them. And muddy parts are slippery, so a walking stick is helpful.

Work to Do

I noticed all the branches that are still down from the Ice Storm, and I'm convinced that I really need to borrow or rent a wood chipper to deal with the debris. Plus, I'll be able to spread the chips on the forest trails, creating a better footing. I could drive my little tractor and wagon to any part of the property and have a lot of work to do, dealing with the brush and the branches.

If I think of it as work in the negative sense, as something I have to do to get it over and done with as quickly as I can, it would be utterly impossible. For one woman, to clean up 14 acres of woodland, by hand? Instead, I think of it positively, as a privilege, as something I get to do. I'm blessed to own 14 acres of

beautiful woodland. I get to spend whole days outside in good weather, accomplishing something that will feel deeply satisfying. The fact that when an area has been cleared of downed branches, only looks the way it always has looked, and should look, I'll push to one side of my mind. I do enjoy working physically outside, feeling the sun and breeze, hearing birdsong, seeing plants that are covered by brush, being opened to the light.

I take breaks when I'm tired, drinking from a water bottle, sitting on a bench or log. It's a pleasant way to be outside. And I look forward to the end of the work day, when I take the equipment back to the house and sit on the verandah next to the herb garden, having a gin and tonic.

The Best G&T

The best way to have a gin and tonic (G&T) is to first put ice cubes into a tall glass. I like the cubes that are not frozen water, but are plastic or metal, because I don't like my G&T to get weakened by melting ice. I like fresh lemon or lime squeezed over the ice cubes, so that the juice will get mixed into what gets poured in next: a strong amount of gin followed by a slightly larger amount of freshly opened tonic water. The fruit wedge can go on top. And it's better yet when someone makes a G&T for me.

Despite how tired and dirty I may be, this is a most civilized time of day, a fitting reward to anticipate for a day of hard work. It's too damp and chilly for this today, but those days are coming soon.

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▲ The tangle of plants hides the pond's overflow channel. PHOTO BY GLORIA HILDEBRANDT.