

We're not such a dominant force in nature (27, 07, 13)

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August approaches with steady warmth, and as I drive about Niagara, an explosion of Queen Anne's lace along roadsides reminds me of first communion and the young girls all dressed in saintly white outfits. For whatever reasons, whether economic or aesthetic, the Region does not spray with poisonous weed-killer which is good because when roadsides are stripped of vegetation, they can be quickly damaged by rain and runoff. Grass and wildflowers provide colour to break up motorist monotony, but also a protective carpet strengthened through each mowing, the detritus forming mulch.



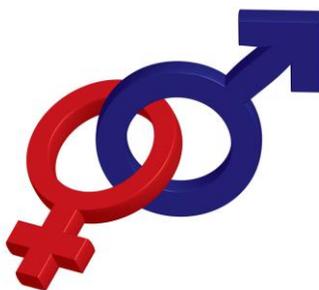
Both Anne, Queen of Great Britain, and her great grandmother Anne of Denmark are taken to be the Queen Anne for whom the plant is named. It is also called wild carrot, and is sometimes confused with hemlock, and we all know what happened to Socrates when he ingested hemlock.

As I get older, vegetation, gardens, trees, vines, shrubs, nature in fact, seizes my attention more and more, often with surprising lessons learned from it. After all, we are not quite the dominant species that we think we are. A volcano or a hurricane immediately dispels that grandiose notion. (As I write this, indigenous people in South America are battling Canada's Barrick Gold that seeks to mine deposits deep under glaciers!)

From our narrow, egotistic point of view, we regard ourselves as the highest achievement in evolving matter, the pinnacle of creation! Yet, nature has a way of humbling us in that its simplest forms suggest a persistence that allows such life to exist for millions of years.

In animals such as us and most insects, male and female cells are produced by separate actors, but some flowers can amazingly produce both kinds of cells and therefore can reproduce in more economic fashion. With flowers, we call fertilization of the female cells pollination, and pollination is a wonderful device employed by nature. Insects, birds, wind and water can all act as pollinators.

It's the same with grandparents. I see myself now as a pollinator or nurturer, helping our little grandsons to grow, and as with nature, I have evolved unique ways to help make this happen because most of the time, these two little guys are thousands of miles away in Vancouver and not playing road hockey with me here in Niagara. We Skype and through that wonderful medium, Miriam and I can communicate with them, watch their bodies grow, attend to their needs and interact albeit in a distant fashion. I wish that somebody had Skyped me when I was their age, but perhaps it's time to overlook such childish impoverishment, although I really could have used much more yang and much less yin.



In Chinese philosophy, the concept of yin and yang is used to describe how seemingly opposite or contrary forces are interconnected and interdependent, yet how they interrelate with one another. Many natural dualities such as male and female, light and dark, high and low, hot and cold, water and fire, life and death, and so on are thought of as physical manifestations of the yin-yang concept.

I think grandchildren prefer to be nurtured by both yin and yang, female and male, but often that just doesn't happen in our world. Marriage is now frequently an endangered species. Some children experience several forms of yang and others are often raised in one-parent (yang) families.

Yin and yang are actually complementary, not opposing forces, interacting to form a whole greater than either separate part; in effect, a dynamic system. Shadow cannot exist without light. Up needs down; in needs out, I need Miriam and so on.

What you get in nature are precarious balances that can be totally ruined by guess who? Yup, us! If we decide to employ the toxic weed killer, we reap the results. Goodbye Queen Anne's lace along the roadsides and thus, after rainfalls, so long also to roadside stability. If all that we offer to one another is our dark or shadow side, goodbye to friends, acquaintances and sadly, even family. I warned you about nature's lessons!