

## THE ROAD TAKEN

by Susan Fitzpatrick, PhD



# Hail and Farewell!

**E**ven though I have lived in the Midwest more than a decade, I remain fascinated by the ferocity of spring storms born from the prairie. I love watching the seemingly coming out of nowhere green-black skies, swirling winds and sheeting rain. I never thought about the toll these storms can exact. That is, until this past May.

While a terrifying hailstorm battered the St. Louis streets below my office window I joked with colleagues about the way the local evening news stations were sure to describe the nickel-shaped pellets of ice as “softball-sized hail.” Having no real experience with hail, the storm was more a curiosity than anything else. From our seats above the fray we watched Mother Nature throw her tantrum — thankful it was only mid-afternoon, leaving plenty of time for things to settle down on the highways before we headed home. Nothing could have prepared me for what awaited me there.

Turning off the main road into my neighborhood a sick feeling grew in the pit of my stomach. The streets were covered with inches of matted green debris. Trees stood unbalanced with their north-facing sides stripped bare of leaves. Gardens that had, only hours before, been lush with foliage and flowers were now beaten and bruised. Pulling into our driveway, it looked as though our yard and garden had experienced the worst of it. The house we’d purchased three years ago needed unlimited renovation and we had only recently turned

our attention to the outside. Most of our plantings were young and tender with little defense against the furious hail. I felt completely defeated.

Desperate, discouraged, distraught — I turned to more garden-experienced friends for solace. They were somewhat sympathetic but mostly upbeat, assuring me all would be fine, that gardens are resilient. By next spring, they promised, it would all be recovered. One friend was, incredulously to me, rather positive, crediting such storms with “opening things up” and encouraging new growth. The consensus was I should ride out this year as best I could (“plant some annuals to fill in the bare spots”) and wait for next spring. I found it hard to imagine there was much to hope for in the tattered remains of my roses and hostas. Weeks later, I am beginning to believe my friends are telling me the truth. Remarkably, there are signs of recovery. Likewise, there are serious losses. But I am learning a valuable lesson. Gardens are not something you ever really finish — they are, like everything natural, continually evolving.

And now I am finally getting to the point. Gardens are a lot like our lives. We plan, nurture, and tend — and just when we’re finally getting it the way we like it — some version of a hailstorm blows in. For

some the results are minor and for others, not. Some effects are temporary and some result in permanent change. Sometimes we have to get through a rough spot by “filling in” and other times we may have no choice but to start over. Papers require revision. Experiments fail. We are passed over for promotion. Partners are recruited out of town. Our new co-worker turns out to be a jerk. But much like roses and hostas, we are resilient. Proposals get funded. We win a prestigious award. A student makes us proud. A career change is more successful than we dared hope.

This is my final column for the *AWIS Magazine*. New responsibilities call me and new writers wait in the wings. Gardens, life, and magazines — nothing endures but change. I have had a great time over the last three years talking with some truly fabulous women. I hope you enjoyed reading about them. I thought a fun way to wrap things up would be to reconnect with some of them and report any transitions and changes. Not surprisingly, in the spirit of inevitable change, there are some! A brief synopsis of their news is provided below. I hope these tidbits will encourage you to read or re-read the original columns!

Wishing you a summer free from hail, but not adventure, I say farewell!

**Gardens are not something you ever really finish —  
they are, like everything natural, continually evolving.**



Sara Kenkare-Mitra



Melanie Leitner



Linda Mantel



Laurie Pohl

**Sara Kenkare-Mitra** (“Survive Adversity by Playing to Your Strengths,” *AWIS Magazine*, Winter 2003) continues to thrive at Genentech. Sara is now Director of Pharmacokinetic and Pharmacodynamic Sciences. The increased responsibility calls on her strengths in communication, strategy, and, of course, her passion for applying science to make a difference in the lives of people with serious medical problems. Her daughter Ria is enjoying her new school. Sara still struggles to balance caring for a special needs child with the demands of a scientific career but says she manages by focusing on what needs to be done “in the here and now.”

**A few new “splinters” from the AWIS board** (“Sharing Knowledge Makes Us All Stronger,” *AWIS Magazine*, Autumn 2003) include the news that **Donna Dean** is spending a two year “sabbatical” from NIH as Senior Scholar in Residence with the National Academy of Engineering of the National Academies of Sciences (NAS). Donna is working with the NAS, federal agencies, academic institutions, and the private sector on issues at the interface of engineering and life sciences.

**Linda Mantel** proves the “R” word (translation = retirement) is irrelevant by being busier than ever. Linda served on the host committee for the 2004 Intel Interna-

tional Science and Engineering Fair. She is about to become Secretary of a local Portland, OR, Sigma Xi chapter and Vice-President of the Board of Directors of the Portland Contemporary Crafts Museum and Gallery. A true renaissance woman, Linda is studying music history and singing in a chorus. AWIS President **Betty Ivey** is serving on the steering committee for a new University Magnet High School of Science and Engineering on the campus of University of Hartford. Betty is getting a crash course in the challenges inherent in public K-12 education — an experience that would make a fascinating story in a future *AWIS Magazine!*

Other board news? **Susan Ganter** is a new mother and the new AWIS Executive Director — quite a bit of news to report! **Melanie Leitner** joined the Center for Accelerating Medical Solutions, and **Sharon Wampler**’s office with the UCSD Extension Team is now part of a larger Workforce Development Center focusing on professional education in business, science, and technology.

**Tammy Astor-Jack and Fran Tucker** (“The Long and Short of Relocation,” *AWIS Magazine*, Summer 2003) successfully negotiated their “summers in transition.” Tammy gave birth to Maximillian in January and is enjoying her fellowship position helping

institutions such as the St. Louis Zoo and the Missouri Botanical Garden improve their professional development programs for science educators. Beginning this fall, Tammy will be heading a research group identifying gaps in basic math and science skills for young children and helping informal science learning institutions develop programs to address the identified gaps.

Fran has little time to miss academia in her new position of coordinator of the After Stroke: Back to Living Program. The program offers individuals in recovery from stroke wellness activities (e.g. yoga, meditation, massage) and in fulfillment of Fran’s hopes, the Aphasia Conversation Connection — offering stroke survivors with communication deficits a place to gather and “chat.”

**Laurie Pohl** (“Executive Recruitment: Searching for the Perfect Fit,” *AWIS Magazine*, Spring 2003) is now Boston University’s Associate Vice President for Enrollment and Student Affairs. She reports that she now has not one but two dogs. Laurie’s return to academic administration has also meant a return to the classroom — she is pursuing a graduate degree in the BU philosophy of science program. ♦

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“I discovered I always have choices and sometimes it’s only a choice of attitude.”

—Judith M. Knowlton