

There Are Beads Hanging From the Loquat!

Written by Will Balk, Jr.

Tuesday, 15 November 2016 07:18 - Last Updated Wednesday, 16 November 2016 06:31



It was a thoughtful and interesting invitation I had received from my friend: would I assist in guiding visitors around her garden in downtown Savannah? The annual garden tour had asked my friend, who often writes about plants and gardening, among many other subjects, for her regular columns in the Savannah Morning News.

I was delighted, of course. I knew her garden, a fascinating, quirky, highly personal venture, from many visits; and I had been a regular on garden tours myself, so I had an idea of the sort of expectations garden tourists have for the gardens they visit.

This was some years ago, and my friend's house and garden were just on the edge of the historic district where most of the gardens on the tour were located. The rather well-heeled garden tourists arrived in their chartered bus at each garden location, disembarked, and walked the ancient brick sidewalks, through charming iron gates, to stroll each garden's carefully structured paths among beautifully selected and highly maintained boxwood and camellia, azalea and lily, statues and urns.

Until, that is, they crossed a couple of streets to my friend's cottage and adjoining garden, warm and inviting, intimately close to her neighbors' cottages. It was a lively, friendly neighborhood of all ages and cultures and backgrounds; it looked and sounded nothing like the stately rows of mansions they had just left.

I was ready when the bus pulled up, and the passengers on the tour descended to the cracked sidewalk. Many seemed to have a very quizzical look on their faces, and their confusion grew when they realized that *this* was their tour garden. The other docents and I quickly jumped in to introduce ourselves and to break the group into smaller groups to talk

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about the garden and to answer questions.

The garden was wild and crazy, filled with found objects. There were strings of beads hanging festively from tree branches; giant horsetail was running all out of the flowerbed against the house, through the pathway, over to the other side and on to take over the world. Bottles of all shapes and colors flanked pathways. Part of a bicycle provided a place to hang potted plants. Garlic, lettuce, cabbage, tomato all were growing where there was sunshine, intermixed with bulbs or sunflowers. It was a cacophony of plants and objects of delight, chosen and placed with utter disregard for traditional order or control. There was a glorious sense of joy in the plants and the garden decorations, an unbridled celebration of growing things and learning and changing. This was NOT Loutrel Briggs at work.

It was wonderful to see these surprised garden visitors pause to take a second look at the garden in front of them, to see the ardent playfulness and the constant newness in such a garden. The contrast to the other gardens on the tour was, of course, the point of this garden's inclusion, and it seemed that revelation struck home with more than a few.

My favorite memory of the day, however, was the woman who muttered as she passed me on the way back to the bus, "This is an insult! I'm demanding my money back!"

My friend, the gardener of this story, is the wonderfully accomplished, delightfully witty and informed writer, Jane Fishman. Jane is a fixture in Savannah, an institution - a role earned as much by her contributions to the wonderful ambience of that city as to her perceptive, informative, and very entertaining columns for the newspaper.

Jane is far more than a gardener, a traveler, and a columnist. Those wonderful columns formed the basis of her first books, *Everyone's Gotta Be Somewhere* and *The Dirt On Jane*. Her third book,

The Woman Who Saved An Island: Sandy West and Ossabaw Island,
is a much loved celebration of the much loved centenarian of Ossabaw.

A fourth book by Jane Fishman is just out this year - *I Grew It My Way: How NOT To Garden*; once again, her columns provided the compost. Whether describing her neighbors and community at the new garden

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where she plants and advises, or explains the particular pleasures of many of the *classic*

garden plants she favors in preference to the current popular ones, Jane takes a reader on a laughing, learning trip through an artful, celebratory garden of delights.

I had thought for a moment that perhaps Jane has taken the old George Herbert maxim, “living well is the best revenge,” and made it into “gardening is the best revenge.”

That’s wrong, though. Jane won’t spare the energy for something so wasteful as revenge. For her, gardening is living well!

I Grew It My Way: How Not To Garden is a complete delight, quite likely to make you feel giddy about being human, and certain to make you relax just a bit about all those chores in the garden awaiting your attention. It’ll also make you want to remember to look up Jane’s columns in the Savannah Morning News, under “Jane’s World.”

The book is published by Real People Publishing; it can be ordered through lulu.com or amazon.com, but . . . always check first with your local independent bookseller to see if it is something they can order for you. No matter what, get it and read it. And please google “Jane Fishman” and “Jane’s World” to introduce yourself to her wonderful column. Your life will be richer for it.