

ALBERT'S GARDEN

by Marcia Newfield

to Louise Kruger

There's always a story
A beginning, a middle,
an end
Each part can go haywire,
turn out, turn in

Albert Eisenlau didn't know how it would turn out
The rubble lot on 2nd Street
pregnant with car fenders, cans, bottles,
refrigerators, televisions.
You name it, the junk piled high

But Albert, an antique dealer,
a neighborhood man,
knew junk could be a veil
for treasures

He saw there could be a place of peace.
Underneath the macadam was dirt... nourishing, fertile dirt
and the cemetery over the wall
built in 1840 with marble vaults,
the first interdenominational burial grounds,
gave promise that the land had seen nobility

So Albert shoveled and schlepped
and bent and braced and
hailed water in buckets
to clear the space.
Others helped him.
It was the beginning. 1971.

When they couldn't move the stones
they let some boulders be,
filled the hole with water,
and thus, a pond
Sculptor Louise Kruger brought a sawhorse
from her studio next door
and cut wood while she watched,
then later planted violets and bleeding hearts
Ben Wohlberg and Mike Brady built walks
and benches.

After Albert moved away and died,
they kept on going, this threesome.
There were no meetings
or landscape plans.
Each did what they saw fit.
It was the middle.

The birds brought seeds
of mulberry and locust
and the one lonely NY weed tree
that had been there before,
the Cinderella ailanthus of the dump,
found herself with company,
the center of a paradise
Where the birds sing
hallelujah

It didn't end there
Three times the machete struck
You're up for sale the City said in 89.
The auction block for you.
A vote to bulldoze.
But hundreds came to protest
Earth Celebrations marched,
shook the tambourines,
and there was reprieve.
The machete struck again
in the early nineties
and again in 99.
This time there was luck and Lady Midler. *

So here we are -back to the beginning
listening to the birds
and the green
and each other.

Thank you, Albert,
for beginning the story
of The Little Lot on 2nd Street that became a Land Trust.

Marcia Newfield, written for the Earth Celebrations Rites of Spring Processions
on May 18, 2002 and read again on May 17, 2003

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* The Trust for Public Land and The New York Restoration Project, Midler's organization, cut deals with the city at this time to purchase a number of existing community garden lots. Albert's Garden, which was already a Green Thumb Garden, was purchased by the Trust for Public Land and is managed by the Manhattan Land Trust.