



The View from Right Field

by Rick Ohler

a bi-weekly column in the

East Aurora Advertiser

“Leafing it All Behind”

Column 374/October 17, 2019/East Aurora, NY

Think back to a year ago. Autumn 2018. After a lackluster fall foliage season during which the leaves kept their usual dramatic crimsons, scarlets, vermillions and oranges to themselves, revealing instead drab grayish yellows, the rains began. As the maples, oaks, cherries, ashes, *et al.* were shedding their final leaves, the cold descended upon us, with snow following about a month earlier than (some) of us might have liked. As a result, only a very few of the 6,456,823 leaves (just a rough estimate I arrived at after consulting several online sources and averaging the answers I received—I could be off by a million or two) that fell on our lawn received any attention from either rake or mechanical device. When winter set up permanent headquarters at latitude 42°78’85”N, longitude 78°63’53”W, there were as many as eight tons (again, an estimate, allowing extra for rain water) of deciduous leaf matter on my lawn. And the way things were looking, all eight tons would stay right where they were until spring finally chased winter back to the arctic. And anyone who has lived here for any length of time knows that winter can sit—like a climatic Jabba the Hutt—on the 14052 and environs well into April and even May. What, we wondered, would be the long-term effects of unraked leaves languishing on our lawn for an entire winter?

Now don’t get the wrong idea; we are not punctilious (RIP Snake, we miss you) Lawn Rangers here at Right Field World Headquarters on the western fringe of the village. We don’t strive for country club perfection in our yard. We brag about our championship dandelions, prize our forget-me-nots and mow around the white, orange and pink wildflowers until they have finished blooming. We use no chemical fertilizers or weed poisons of any kind and are usually rewarded with a lawn that survives both draught and deluge and gives us a serviceable, if imperfect, green area. So even we worried that (approximately) eight tons of leaves would kill our grass and leave us with nothing but mud.

Then a funny thing happened. Eventually, last April, the snows receded and the rains became intermittent instead of constant. Warmth won the battle with cold. I figured that I better get out and finish my 2018 raking chores. Surprise. The lawn I had

assumed would have suffocated sprang to life. The millions of overwintering leaves had become brittle and transparent as they hurried toward decomposition. Most disintegrated with the first pass of the lawn mower. Dandelions arose proudly from dormancy, and the eclectic ingredients of our lawn—plantain, veronica, crab grass, violets, creepin' Charlie, various mosses, mushrooms, clover and fescue—proceeded to make a carpet, albeit a patchwork carpet, just as they always had.

Fast forward to autumn 2019, the bye week. No Bills game to distract the suburban homeowner. In the time it's taken me to write the first half of this column, between 12,500 and 13,870 leaves (again, just an estimate) have fallen on top of the several hundred thousand already on the ground. I should be out there raking, right? Or should I? Why bother? Mother Nature seems to have things quite well in hand. And like any rational human being old enough for membership in the Aurora Senior Center, I'll grasp any excuse to get out of the bursitis-inducing and rotator cuff-aggravating process of raking.

What fondness I once had for leaf raking goes back 50 or 60 years when we used to rake the leaves of the Oakwood Avenue sugar maples out to the curb where we first jumped in the mountainous piles, then burned them, delighting in the aroma that filled the street. For a special treat, we'd filch a few forbidden chestnuts from Mrs. Thomason's off-limits tree, throw them into the fire and wait for them to pop like firecrackers. Environmental awareness was not yet our strong suit.

Of course, the neighbors would probably like me to make some sort of effort at leaf management this fall. It's not an uber-bourgie street we live on, but almost all the homeowners keep their places tidy and wouldn't want Kateri's and my small parcel to be the rotten apple spoiling the barrel that is our neighborhood. Last year was an aberration; we all got a pass on raking because of the weird weather. I doubt we'll be that lucky two years in a row.

How about a compromise? I'll let the leaves pile up behind the house where only the deer and crows can be disgusted with my laziness. But I'll rake the lawn out front to look like a proper villager. And I'll promise to rake only—NO leaf blower. Man those things are horrid. What burning leaves was to air pollution, leaf blowers are to noise pollution. I mean, we've already got lawn mowers, weed whackers, chain saws, power trimmers, power washers disturbing the peace; do we really need leaf blowers that run at ear-piercing decibels?

I remember 15 years ago when my good friends Thomas and Katherine Drescher, both 60 or so, up and moved from Park Place to the Schiller Park neighborhood on the far east side of Buffalo off Delevan. "Why in the world would you move from East Aurora to the city?" I asked incredulously. "It's supposed to be the other way around."

"We like the quiet in the city," he said.

He had a point. Last Friday, I was interviewing Aktion Clubber Mark Montague at his residence on Center Street. It was a perfect fall afternoon: temperatures in the upper 60s, brilliant sunshine, trees turning, no wind. We thought we'd have our interview on the front porch to take advantage of the clement weather. Well, the din from no fewer than three leaf blowers in the neighborhood drowned out the relaxing conversation we had hoped for.

Today, Monday, anyway, it looks like rain, so I'll leave it all behind. For the meantime, I'll leave it all behind.