

Starting Over 1974

by Ginnah Howard

Stone-gathering became my job
by default. Digging the foundation, trundling
the loaded wheelbarrow away from the site,
yours. While you planted your shovel deep,
arced it full from the trench³/₄in, up, out³/₄
I searched the dry brook for good rocks:
a flat face, at least four inches deep, and not
too heavy for me to heave or haul to the top
of the bank. Twenty-five stones a day my quota
(only a thousand or so more to go);
then I was free.

(Where were the kids?)

Wild strawberries hid, and scooting on my rear
through all that hot June green, I found them—
enough for my first batch of jam, the only wild strawberry
jam I would ever make. I got to know the grasshopper, eyeball
to eyeball, his whirring away. I wandered the edges
for blackcaps. Rural convert: it was my summer for identifying:
bird's foot trefoil, St John's wort, viper's bugloss.

(They must have been somewhere, happy.)

After a bulldozer ripped through the woods, taking out
trees, leaving a raw strip of road much wider than we'd
wanted, from here on in we'll do it ourselves, we said.
If the Nearings could put up eleven stone buildings, well...
All winter we'd been reading *The Whole Earth Catalog*,
ordering stuff: a well-drilling device, pamphlets on home
burial, homegrown, and if Ken Kesey said,
"The Ashley is one honey of a stove," well,

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that was the one for us.

