

Secret

*by Mike Harris*

The word implies something known just to one person. If more than one knows then it is no longer a secret. So a secret is usually something that has happened to an individual that the person will not share with anyone else.

Here I better set the stage so that what follows will make some sense. On a farm a ten year old is big enough to be assigned certain chores. My father, a wonderful perceptive parent, followed the normal practices and while I had my jobs, if diligently attended to, left me with what I like to call my dream or exploratory time.

Well I guess after eighty six years I can divulge a secret place where a ten year old would hide and dream fantasies without end. It was on my Dad's farm outside the village of Kerhonkson, a small dairy operation. The farm boundary abutted the property of two elderly sisters, with the family name of "Schoonmaker." The story goes that their husbands who were brothers married sisters. The brothers were Scandinavian ship builders who bought the property and settled their wives and families here. The families grew up away from the noisy boisterous waterfront. This was their haven. In time, as was the custom, the children grew up and made their own way, and the parents returned to live their final years in peace and contentment. The men died and the sisters eked a out a subsistence, but the farm itself pretty much returned to nature.

Where their property joined my father's there was a grape arbor, long forgotten and overgrown. Here a ten year old red headed young boy with a curiosity that was a part of and still is a huge part of his nature, one day while exploring found the tangled arbor of concord grapes. Burrowing into the arbor he found the vines made a comfortable nest, with a lot of shade from the hot August sun; also the grapes hung in clusters and had a powdery blue cast. Getting comfortable in the nest he reached for a handy bunch of grapes, sweet yet tart and delicious. He leaned back and started to day dream. It became a place to go after chores were completed.

My father before returning to the farm house always inspected my work and before we would sit at table for the evening meal he would comment on what I had done that day. Usually it was complimentary and always instructive. So I was always being taught without my even knowing that I was in life's schoolroom. One of the conversations happened to touch on the "Gardens of Babylon".

So the grape arbor became my private garden hideaway Here with a book that I kept in a canvas waterproof bag I would dream my boyhood dreams, visit places that never existed and I was the explorer. Kipling's "Jungle Book" was one of my favorites, as was Jules Verne's "Around the World in Eighty Days" and "Twenty Thousand Leagues Under the Sea". What happy, happy times in my Babylonian Garden.

So now after eighty six years I no longer have a secret. Do I miss it? Yes and no. I often hope that my children may harbor some similar secret, but I really do not know otherwise it would not be a secret would it?

