

# KELLY'S CORNER

by Jan Kelly

With each direction of the wind, the woods are different. This morning's is from the northeast, cold and insistent, no wafts of warmth and whimsy like a southwest wind, but a steady unbroken draft. You have to be aware of a northeast wind. It's not for relaxing. The trees make a constant "hush hush" sound. Leaves and pine needles both are pressed to a constant brushing, and the woods are controlled by this movement and sound.

Most birds avoid it. Only the ruby-crowned kinglets refuse to be put in their place. Though so tiny as to be a bit of fluff, this courageous bird pursues the wind treetop to treetop, its song like thin metallic lines in all the hushing of the green. An occasional jay, an occasional crow flit from branch to branch: sturdy, heavy birds but more shy of the wind than the tiny kinglet. High above all the green are migratory flocks of blackbirds readying to leave for warmer climes. Their chucking noise will be the last we hear of them until February next when their brave "con ka ree" will defy the winter and invite the spring.

Leaving the higher elevation of the woods, I stopped by a pond: the wind out of the north blowing over the water pushing that fresh water smell of saturated and decomposing vegetation, the Earth in change. Only a few gulls can be seen on the far side enjoying some shelter from a hill. The ducks and geese are tucked among the reeds enjoying better shelter. It's cold; I go deeper into the woods. I leave the trees and wind behind. Sitting in a low and sheltered spot, the wind seems far away. The pounding of the surf on the backshore seems closer. With a bit of imagination you can smell the salt, feel the spray. You can hear this distant beach action so well. You can isolate the sound of one wave from another. Mesmerized, you decide this is a good place to pass some time.

People in their 50s and those older remember when all of Provincetown homes had their own gardens, fruit

trees, chickens, pigs, and perhaps a cow. Some gardens remain, some are new. The animals are gone. The fruit trees remain isolated, skeletal, and overlooked since they just happen to be left on developed property. You may see a pear tree blossoming and bearing fruit from its patch of territory surrounded by cottages. Unpruned and forgotten as a functional plant, someone may notice the blossoms on a sunny day. That's all the attention

they get. Quoins, apple, and pear are the types. The most dramatic and most cared for is Philly Alexander's six-graft tree—five types of apples and one pear growing from one tree! Though untended, the others continue to bear fruit, and some of this fruit is still used.

After marathon tennis as a farewell to the clay courts, Frank Milby invited me to pick some of the pears from his yard. Milby was in the process of painting the trim on his house, and as he painted and I picked, we chatted.

Frank Milby has been in Provincetown for twenty-five years. He is originally from Queens, New York, and began work with Mal Newman at his starving artists studio in the village doing portraits. Frank spent one year in New Orleans and then settled in Provincetown. He stayed "right away yearround. No

one was here in the winter." But, he liked it here though it is "harder and harder" now. "There's no property left. The rents are high. But, I like the lifestyle. You can dress as you want."

Frank said he didn't "decide" to be an artist, he just "always did art." He received a two-year scholarship to the School of Visual Arts. For twenty years Frank both painted and did portraits. Now he only does portraits by commission. By doing portraits, he could make good money, but he had no time to paint. "A commissioned portrait may take two months to paint; it's not a twenty-minute portrait. That's a sketch." Carpentry and house painting have supplemented Frank's income these twenty-five years. "Painting is something you do.



*"This is my latest mural.  
I call it House."*

Selling is a by-product. I'd be more successful with painting if I just did flowers. But, you start painting this and that. You may paint ten flowers and never paint them again. You do something else. That's the reason for painting. It's not to paint one thing because you sell it. In painting, you change. That's why I got out of portraits. That's a likeness, not a painting. Maybe you don't sell it, but you like it. A gallery could say 'gimme thirty paintings' and maybe they're all the same."

"You like to paint trees also, don't you Frank?"

"Yeah, I love trees. When I was a kid, I hung out in the woods. Trees are sorta' like friends. There's great solace in trees. You can feel them. They have a personality. If you're upset, go sit under a tree for half an hour. It'll fix you right up. Artists repeat subject matter, but the painting is different every time. How many times have I painted the pier, but it's different every time. Now they're going to take the fish house. Good-bye to Motif #2."

"I work mostly on commissions now. I just dwell on it, and then I paint it. Along those lines you have to beware of something, the selling point and to be honest, it's a fight. It's just not right that people may like it, but if it isn't honest, it isn't good."

"When you see a sunflower or an iris, you get so excited. You go crazy. What are you going to do? You're always painting the same painting. I like to paint black people. I don't know why. You get the same feeling from a vase of flowers, an African, an Iowan. You get the same kind of feeling. Boy, it's work to get started. Then you get lost, and eight hours is like twenty minutes. You're always scared. You don't even think you can do anything. There's just the empty canvas, and you can't ask anyone for help. The only way to do it is to get my ass into the studio, get the canvas on, and get started. Then you're in another world. That's the fun part: right, wrong, or saleable. It's hard to talk about art. It's an expression without words. All the adjectives in the world don't describe a painting. I can't describe what I want to do. I have to paint it. It's frustrating to see and feel and not paint. It's gone. You have to consolidate. You wanna' paint ten things, so you gotta' put it all into one. Landscapes, seascapes, whatever, the feeling is more important than the subject matter. The excitement is to get that thing you are

looking for."

"It takes time to paint. I coulda' went into business with my brother. He's a success. He makes a lot of money. I always wanted to be an artist with a studio, so I'm a success. What's the criteria? The real problem is a gallery. Success is the same kind of sh—. But, I'm a successful painter. I paint what I want. I like carpentry, too, and building. But, you need to paint. If I told you how many times I almost chucked it."

"I don't like a day without accomplishment. Oh, you need money to buy stuff but a few decent strokes on a canvas, and I feel I've accomplished something. It's the only thing that makes me feel great. After two weeks around the house, you appreciate painting and the studio so much."

Provincetown has changed, but it happens everywhere. The art colony get squeezed out by the businessman. Abe Sader and his Japanese Junk comes in, and the artist is squeezed out. It's almost like they want the P'town people out now. Look at the driveway in the right-of-way across the street. Even the banks have changed—everything. Just gotta' go away and start another P'town somewhere, somewhere over the rainbow. There will always be a new P'town somewhere. This one got started. I might *have* to leave. It changes. You gotta' accept change. I still like it here. I'll probably leave when there's no more beachcombers. That'll be the time to go. Artists are jerks. They can't organize. They can't get together. They're individuals even among themselves. The gays are all organized. They're in Town Hall and in real estate. Artists always fail at that sort of thing."

I picked pears and Frank talked. Not your formula interview: brush strokes and words. Quiet work makes you think a lot.

Frank's work has been shown exclusively at the Tenyson Gallery for one year. He does well there. So many houses in Provincetown have a Milby. He does capture the spirit of Provincetown, and it is good art. "It's tough selling, but you gotta' paint. If you worry about selling, forget it. Painting is more important."

So I took this photograph of Frank, as you see, painting.

"This is my latest mural. I call it *House*."