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LINDA – Fieldnotes – Saturday, November 3, 2007

Subject: NYCares

Location: Wilson Garden, 122nd st between Douglass and Powell

Time: approx 11:30 – 1:40

The last time I saw Cindy she told me that NYCares volunteers were coming today. I asked if I could come, indicating that I would work but also that I wanted to see what was happening. She told me that people were coming at 10 or 11, and I showed up close to 11:30.

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When I arrived people were at work around the garden: a woman near the entrance, two people at a plot on the east side of the garden (near where the face-painting station was), and one guy near the fire pit. Fialka, the treasurer of the block association, was also there and we greeted one another. A woman stood with Cindy near the green table, which was set with yellow and green mesh bags of bulbs, a box of fabric gloves, a box of polyurethane gloves, trowels, and other miscellaneous items. They greeted me, the woman with, "Volunteer or neighbor?" Cindy said "both." Joan, who I learned was the project leader, wanted to put me to work by myself, but I told her I wanted to see what people were doing first. Everyone there at the time but me was white, in the skin color sense, and I was not surprised.

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I grabbed a pair of gloves and a trowel from the green table, and went to the plot on the east side and met Heather and Young Male [can't remember his name]. Heather too asked me, "Volunteer or neighbor?" I answered, "Both," saying that I lived nearby.

Heather appeared to be in her mid-thirties. She was wearing a light gray sweatshirt, a long t-shirt underneath, black exercise pants, and a cap. She has dark hair and eyes, porcelain skin. He was wearing a dark gray sweatshirt, can't remember what color, and dark blue denim jeans. He had sandy colored hair, a little long, and pinkish skin.

They were digging holes in the plot, 4 inches deep, they told me, and placing bulbs inside them. None of us had much gardening experience and joked about it.

Young Male is a student majoring in biology, specifically human genetics. I walked into their conversation. His dream is to travel around the world sequencing people's DNA. He says it won't pay too well but at least he'll get to travel.

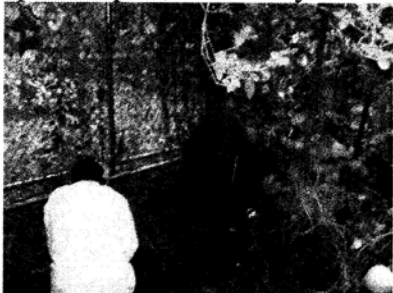
I did not hear Heather talk about what she does. I talked briefly about my research project. I also asked her about NYCares, which she said was "great." Neither she nor Young Male had worked in this garden before.

I took over two of Young Male's holes, and dug another one, damaging roots in the process. I didn't know what I was supposed to be doing, but Heather assured me neither did they. I covered my holes after seeing Heather start to fill hers in, but Young Male said

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we were supposed to wait for Cindy. I started uncovering my bulbs, and Heather did as well.

Cindy came by and gave us more bulbs to plant. Heather recounted her surprise that so many could be planted in the same hole. She asked Cindy if the holes needed to be spaced apart, and Cindy said no.



Heather showed me that the pointy end of the bulb was to go up. For bulbs that didn't have an obvious point, she instructed me to put the root side down.

Here is a blurry picture of them when they moved to another area towards the back of the garden.

Next I went to see what Joan and Cindy were doing: planning which bulbs would go where at the green table. [I didn't take a picture of the many mesh bags of bulbs Cindy had donated from various organizations,] I wrote down in my notebook the names of the various flowering plants as they said them, also checking labels on the bags: daffodils, allium (purple sensation allium), anemone (?? didn't see a bag of this), Rembrandts, Mediterranean bells.

Cindy told me this was the third planting. I asked Joan when the last one was, and she said October 13. Cindy told me they planted tulips, allium, grape hyacinth. [I have no idea what most of these look like.] Joan and Cindy set aside a few bags "for the front."

Joan told me that most of the time there are 20 volunteers, but with the weather they figured not as many people would show up. It was in the high 40s and overcast, and I dressed a little more warmly than others, in thermals and multiple layers on top including a fleece jacket. [I don't know if it's really true that they usually get a full house of volunteers, but I can understand less people showing up than expected on a cold blustery day]

Joan then assigned me "to the front." I didn't really want to work by myself, but they needed someone there. Joan showed me that I should pull back the rocks surrounding a large planter "about five or six inches," dig holes, and plant bulbs. Then she told me to dig a trench instead. I asked Joan if I could take pictures. She seemed surprised, and I realized that Cindy didn't tell her who I was. I briefly explained myself and she told me she would go around and ask everyone.

Joan went to the woman nearby as I began moving rocks and asked her if I could take pictures. The woman looked mildly alarmed and I moved into her line of sight. I told her what I was doing and said that she would not need to look up (show her face). I think her

name was Christy. She was wearing a light gray sweatshirt, blue jeans, and sneakers. Her hair was tied in a ponytail behind her head. She also had pinkish skin.

Instead of taking a picture I started digging. I asked her if the holes needed to be far apart and she said no. When I stuck the trowel into the ground I immediately cut a worm in two (I think) and expressed my faint dismay. Christy said sympathetically that she was trying not to hurt the worms. I also asked her what to do when I encountered roots, and she told me that Cindy said, "Go through them."

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Christy had some gardening experience but initially said that she lives in New York, implying that you cannot have a garden here. Later she said that she had had a garden before, and her mother grew tomatoes and peppers. I said my mom also grew beans and tomatoes but I didn't do much gardening work as a child.



Christy has not worked in this garden before, either. She briefly complained about her back hurting.

As we talked she planted the bulbs, covered them, and covered the dirt with a layer of mulch: very dark looking with fine grains. I expressed my surprise, saying that I thought mulch had more bark and leaves. She picked out a bit of bark to show me.

Here is a picture of her at a different location.

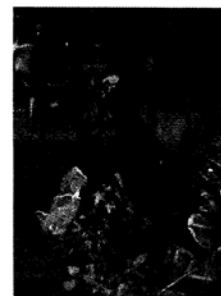
As I worked, a middle-aged couple came in: a white man wearing a windbreaker and a Asian American woman in a parka. They did not stay long. I did not find out their business.

Cindy also came by as I was digging, telling me to plant half the bulbs where I was digging and the other half on the other side.



I took a break after digging my first trench and placing the bulbs to see what people were doing and to take pictures. I can't remember what's going on here, but that's Cindy in the turquoise jacket and yellow shirt. Maybe that's the white/Asian couple.

I went to see what Heather and Young Male were doing and took their picture. Then I took the picture of the Latino-looking male who was now working near the bridge. He didn't respond to my overtures to chat. He was wearing a black leather jacket, which



looked too nice for the garden, and was digging without getting close to the ground, holding onto the bridge, as pictured. [It looked painful for his back.] He had black hair cut short, wore black wire-rimmed glasses, and had a moustache.

I went back to the front of the garden. Joan came and saw the first trench and said I did a “good job.” She brought me more bulbs, daffodils, after seeing how few stretched around the planter. She then decided to help me by covering up the bulbs I had placed in the first trench. We got to talking and she said that she can’t squat like I was because she recently broke her tibia. When I expressed sympathy she said that she had also broken her pelvis. I asked her if she had to go through physical therapy and she said she’s had enough for her lifetime. I asked if she had to wear a cast and she said no, but she has a bunch of pins and plates in her leg. She said something about riding (horseback) and I ask if that’s how she injured herself. She confirms this. She leaves to get mulch to cover the dirt.

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As I worked Haja came in and greeted Joan. He said hello in my direction and started a little when he recognized me. I kept working and he kept going deeper into the garden.

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