

A bridge to somewhere

Rick Redington and I go back to our years at St. John's College. I remember many late nights of jibber-jabbing about Plato, Hegel, and the Grateful Dead. But when Rick moved away, we lost touch.

When he re-immigrated, he was single and very guitar-focused, and I had a pregnant wife and 20 employees. I can't say which one of us was Little Jackie Papers and who was Puff, but it wasn't until a mutual friend died that Rick felt at ease asking for some free garden advice.

Rick first brought over some sketches. Although creative and well-meaning, the plans he had for his pad off West Alameda were much too Euclidean. "Read these," I said yanking five or six permaculture books off of various bookcases and thrusting them into his sparkling gaze, "and call me when you're done."

Rick, a renter, was incredibly enthusiastic about food gardening. To him, it didn't matter that he didn't own land. Like Candide at the end of Voltaire's *Candide*, Rick

had discovered the essential mantra, "It is necessary to cultivate a garden."

So he did. And he came over the other day to tell me all about it.

He ended up with wonderful waffle-garden beds like the Anasazi, a compost pile like my grandma's, a thick sheet mulch, a keyhole garden, and an herb spiral right out of *Permaculture*. "Six chiles, six tomatoes, eight garlic, rows and rows of that corn-squash combo," Rick began, as a slightly melancholy smile connected his ears, "Thirty-two strawberry plants, 70 Walla Walla onions, cukes here, pintos there, and hundreds," holding back a nervous giggle, "literally hundreds, of beets."

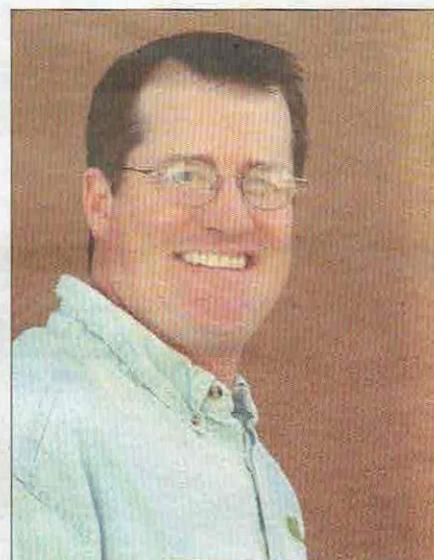
Before his garden popped up, the co-chair of the English department at Santa Fe High claimed that, "Other than the occasional visitor that would stop for a brief rest before quickly moving on, I never had any birds to speak of. Now, I've got mountain bluebirds, house finches, sparrows, a couple of orioles and a number of other

avian friends I can't identify.

"One morning, while eating home-grown beet greens and local *huevos*, I was planning another trip across the river to Plants of the Southwest. But then I heard a series of three strange rumbles followed by "the most-piercing beep known to man." Rick stopped smiling. "That was the day they started to build the bridge over the Santa Fe River connecting Alameda and Cerrillos via Siler. Unfortunately, leading my cloistered life as an English teacher, I'd never heard of the thing."

Like that archetypal figure who wakes from perfect bliss to be confronted by Progress, Rick's prospects are grim. Although his landlord said he's welcome to stay ("The house isn't going to be touched!"), Rick is wondering if he'll have to move.

I had to laugh and tell Rick that his existential experience could easily be a blessing in disguise. In this less-expensive market and with the incentives that exist



NATE DOWNEY

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"I know," he said. "I know."

Nate Downey is president of Santa Fe Permaculture, Inc., an ecological landscape-design firm. His book Harvest the Rain is in the advance-praise harvesting phase of the publication process. Please contact him via www.sfpermaculture.com or 505-424-4444.

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