

Ten years ago, I learned of a nature preserve called German Methodist Prairie. It's a small but profoundly significant remnant of native black soil prairie...never plowed...never bulldozed...centuries old. I went there in May of that year and spent time among shooting stars and cream wild indigo. I tried to imagine the soft pastels of shooting star spreading toward the horizon, as far as the eye could see, and then some. I tried to imagine vast oceans of Indian grass and big bluestem waving this way and that in a late-summer wind. I thought about the early settlers, bumping along in covered wagons...hoping to find a water hole soon...little girls in bonnets and frocks gathering handfuls of bright flowers.... "What's this one called, Mama?"..."I don't know, dear, but it kinda looks like a falling star, doesn't it?" I thought about the native Americans... their efficient way of life, the hardships they endured on the prairies, and the tragedy of their demise. I wondered about the Indians' sacred places, where the bones of their ancestors lay undisturbed for centuries, only to be desecrated by the white man. It was sad to think of them, resting without honor beneath highways, parking lots, town houses, and farm fields, where tall, tall grasses once reached upward, as if in supplication to the Great Spirit. I came back to reality and looked toward the horizon. I saw vacant land...dead land, spreading in all directions around the preserve, as far as the eye could see, and then some. Gone were the prairie chickens, the buffalo, and river otters. Gone were the white fringed orchids, the pasque flowers, and the prairie groves with trees nine feet in diameter. Gone were the native microbes and mycorrhizal fungi of the soil...dead land, surrounding the preserve. My trip to the beautiful and historic German Methodist Prairie was a moving experience. I was profoundly happy to be there, but I was deeply distressed when I realized what we had lost. After that day, my greatest wish was to find another little piece of tallgrass black soil prairie for Indiana.

Strangely enough, a Compass Plant directed me to this prairie. I was driving along Lake Park Avenue one day, and I saw a Compass Plant at the edge of a shrubby thicket. Knowing that Charles Deam called it "a true prairie plant," I thought "What are you doing here?", and I thought maybe, probably not, but maybe there could be a nearby seed source. A search of the area led me to this beautiful meadow of Compass Plants, Prairie Docks, Prairie Gentians, and Prairie Phlox. Good things are still being discovered out here. A few weeks ago I found a population of *Spiranthes magnacamporum*, the Great Plains Ladies Tress Orchid. Sadly, this genetic data bank for tallgrass prairie plants and animals will be lost very easily if regular fires are not allowed to occur.

We should all be very grateful to Myrna Newgent, Barbara Plampin, Peg Mohar, and Paul Kohlhoff for the enormous amount of work they did to get this bit of history preserved. It was not an easy task for them. We should also be grateful to Terry McCloskey and his crew for the stewardship work they are doing. This work is necessary and very important. To these people, I must say: the world is a better place because of you.

On behalf of all things natural, wild, and free, and on behalf of my favorite planet (the earth), I would like to thank the organizations and people who provided funding for this project. Special thanks are in order for students and teachers in "The Clean World Association." The world is a better place because of you.

In 1940, in his monumental book *Flora of Indiana*, Charles Deam wrote: "The extermination of our native prairie plants will soon be complete" (end quote). Friends, let us all do what we can to make sure that Deam's lament will never come true.

Thank you very, very much!