

Some years ago, during a bone-dry summer, draught killed the giant maple tree in my front lawn. The sun burned its leaves right off, leaving a giant dried-out skeleton perched in my lawn.

The tree's death had consequences. Because it was a major player in the lawn's ecosystem, once the tree was gone, everything else collapsed. Without the tree, the sun quickly destroyed the grass and flowers. Then the weeds invaded—many types, some with prickly armor that drew blood, some with strong fibrous roots that bore deep and held tight. Like an occupying army, the weeds blanketed my front yard.

I fell into a pit of despair. I was beaten and broken. All was lost.

But then I had a revelation: change the paradigm.

Sure, I was beaten and broken in one paradigm, the one that said: I must have a lawn with green grass in my front yard. That's the dominant paradigm in my neighborhood. Nearly every house has a lawn with grass in front, most with irrigation systems.

But is the dominant paradigm always the best and most appropriate paradigm?

According to the revelation I received: no.

Change the paradigm, the Revelator said. Imagine a different reality, one that'll support a diverse array of life, and then create it. Xeriscape, the Revelator said.

So xeriscape I did. It took three years, and lots of blisters on my hands from digging, raking, and pulling chunks of limestone, but I managed to create a new reality in my front yard, one filled with drought-resistant sage, agave, and rosemary. Then I planted two draught-resistant trees, provided free by the city. Then I placed a bird bath and two bird feeders amongst the sage. Over the years, it's been an on-going project, one requiring continuous maintenance and care.

The sage is tall and healthy-looking this spring, with different varieties blooming red, orange, blue, and yellow flowers. Bees are humming in the sage, especially around the blue flowers. I'm supporting about 50 birds, all of whom live around my house. Every day I see 5 blue jays, 2 cardinals, 8 to 12 doves, a mockingbird, a titmouse, and lots of little finches and wrens who nest in the rosemary. In the summer, hummingbirds swing by. When I walk my dog through the neighborhood, I pass lawn after lawn with grass and no birds. Then I turn the corner to my house, and from four houses down I can hear the birds singing in my yard.

Occasionally, a large hawk descends and perches on a tree I planted. The hawk sits facing my house watching the bird feeders. When it appears, the small birds disappear, which means the activity on each bird-feeder stops, which means the squirrels waiting below for seed to fall don't get no satisfaction. More than once, I've seen a squirrel climb the tree and chatter at the hawk till the hawk flies off. Five minutes later, the squirrels are happy again because the little birds feel safe enough to eat. It's an interesting eco-system out there, and I haven't even mentioned the butterflies.

When the giant maple tree died, and the grass and flowers disappeared, and the invading weeds stormed in, I experienced my own small version of cascading crises, and I felt angry and sad. After a series of hard shocks, what I knew as normal—my front lawn, the dominant paradigm—was in ruins. And it wasn't coming back, it couldn't come back.

But with different thinking, applied imagination, and hard work, I helped create a new reality, one that supports a diverse array of life, one that I now enjoy. I'm not glad the giant maple tree died, but I celebrate what I helped create, a more wholesome alternative to the dominant paradigm. Life sure is complicated, filled with loss and gain, grief and joy.

I've been pondering my front yard lately. The whole experience raises questions pertinent to today.

How deeply and thoroughly will this global pandemic shock, disrupt, change, or ruin what's normal to us?

Will this global pandemic be the last hard shock we experience for a while, and will we have time to recover, or will a series of hard shocks hit us, one crisis after another—some that occur as a direct result of the current one, some that are climate-disruption related?

Will all the dominant paradigms remain intact, or will some come to ruin? If they don't all remain intact, if some come to ruin, will we get sad and angry, or fall into despair? Or might we celebrate the demise of some, even help to bring about their change?

If need be, will we be able to change our ways of thinking, apply our imaginations, and work hard to create new ways of supporting life in places where much has been lost?

I don't know what the future holds. So many scenarios seem possible. I'm open to revelation.

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