

# The State of Grafton

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Sunday, 23 July 2006  
Last Updated Sunday, 23 July 2006

It's been several months since we moved up and it's time for an update. I've learned a lot about myself in this time. For example, when left to my own devices, I can occasionally sleep past 8, but it takes commitment and usually drugs. I have the attention span of a butterfly, flitting from flower to flower, as a result, my yard and house are filled with semi-completed projects. I do eventually finish them,- it just takes longer than it should for each one. My dog is company enough for me in my burnt-out state, I consistently under-estimate how much effort any given project is going to take when it's just me doing it. And finally, I am a perplexing combination of procrastinator and A-type personality, when something does not turn out the way that I expect it to, I become discouraged and it can take me a long time to get started again- to either fix or forgive.

We're lucky to have so many friends and family in the city and suburbs, who love the country. The smattering of guests throughout the winter made the dark months go by quickly. Otherwise, I spent my time figuring out where to do the shopping, becoming comfortable with silence, and trying to rearrange our stuff to make it all fit in this one house- 3 truckloads full of donations later and we're getting closer. This year's party, which once seemed eons away, is now creeping up on us and I am now running against the clock to make room for everyone by the time this year's party comes (August 26th everyone! Mark your calendars! We have the tower and are now working on the cement!)

Living in the city, I had forgotten how dark nighttime could really be. Here in the middle of 100 acres (100 Acre Wood?), the only lights we see are the moon, the stars, twilight in the summer, and the Canaan Raceway in the summer. Some nights, when the sky is dark or cloudy, the only lights which give me bearing are our solar lanterns along the driveway, they are my compass as I shuffle to the bathroom. Other nights, the light of the moon is bright enough to wake us from a dead sleep. I laugh evilly when I go to bed and see Dan's pillow bathed in moonlight. He snickers and proclaims my side the "hot seat" when he rolls over in the middle of the night and finds me fully awake, glaring at the moon.

But now, several months later having established some semblance of a routine, the summer months are upon us and with them; bugs, berries, birds, and the plenty that comes with the warmth.

Gardening has been a challenge for me. The soil in the Granite State is surprisingly rocky. Landscaping, some as yet to be determined percentage of 100 acres, is overwhelming. Where to start? Is that ANOTHER rock? Where to put THIS? What can I reasonably do this season? How to water? Can this go next to that? Not enough rain. Too much rain. When to fertilize? When to seed? When to plant? The combination and permutations of HOW to garden are countless and well beyond my experience to date. Thankfully, many of the plants that we bought this first season were strictly to diversify the flora on our property- wild ginger and ginko, American chestnut, black walnut. These went far out into the woods, so it was mostly irrelevant where we place them. I started out with tools and the plants and some compost in a wheelbarrow and when I got tired, I stopped and planted what I had.

I am determined to have a decent vegetable garden though, so fertilizer and loam were needed to bulk up the soil. I enlisted the help of our friend, Brian (a very, very patient soul) to help me get cow manure for the garden with his trailer (I mean really- I don't want poo in MY truck!) As I shoveled the cow poo over my garden into an even layer, thoughts tumbled through my head- knee deep in shit... PLOP. Shoveling shit. PLOP. An image of my father popped into my head saying, "I push paper," in answer to my persistent questions of, "but Dad, what do you DO?" PLOP. An image of me pushing my own papers on my desk at one of my jobs. PLOP. Up to my eyeballs in paperwork. PLOP. After three cubic yards of cow manure and three cubic yards of loam and lots of shoveling and rototilling, I finally have a decent-sized garden and I certainly feel as though I accomplished something- a satisfaction often stripped from my paper pushing tasks. My pumpkins are flourishing and conspiring to take over Grafton. I have tomatoes reddening which are fixin (that's right "fixin") to be fair-winner quality. And the most exciting for me right now is the delicata squash. YUM!

Every morning, Daisy and I go out and check the plants that were planted this year or last- see how they are and what's coming up. Despite the rocks, our soil does seem to be healthy. So far, everything has survived the winter, but the deer

and moose are another battle. Strategy is still being developed. I'll update on the plan of attack later- think fencing, dangling AOL CDs, and fishing line.

We had our first experience at an official town "meeting". I use that term loosely as the anarchy that ensued provoked memories of yearbook or prom planning meetings in high school, with all the drama, machismo, and impropriety that comes with hormone-laden, speckle-faced teenagers. We went to the Planning Board meeting to ask if we were missing something or can we REALLY just put up a windmill without notifying anybody. Everyone on the board amiably nodded and wished us luck and even asked us to come back in a year and tell them how it went. Then they moved on to the issue of much contention- the Master Plan. At face value, it seemed simple- update the Plan which is now out of date. One of the members was charged with reviewing the old Plan and presenting his findings. He recommended that they simply take the old Plan, take out the old facts and strategies leaving only a template and updating. Seemed simple to us. We nodded politely, but then the fuse was lit. The man with the gavel (we'll call him Chuck) squinted up his face and pinched the furrow in his brow between his thumb and forefinger and started with, "I don't mean to be critical, but some of us don't believe that census data is needed and it's a violation of my rights. Some of us moved here to be free. Some of us don't believe in census data. Some of us don't want our salary information in census data or in reports and masterplans. It's none of anyone's business, but mine. I mean why would you want that information? What does it provide?" To which the first gentleman replied that it provided information on services that might be needed in the population- a senior center or bus service to Lebanon, for example. Know where you are to know where you're going. As innocent as that seemed, it resulted in a whirlwind of commentary from Chuck and another young man (we'll call him Mike) about how that was redistribution of wealth and it's unconstitutional and all sorts of accusations of illegal activities and oppression. The tirades left Dan and I mouth-gaping, mind-numbingly stunned.

In another turn of events, I went out and got a job at Dartmouth Hitchcock's Cancer Center and I love it. It's only part-time, but Dartmouth is very generous with benefits and it has so many conveniences that I'm not sure that I would give it up even if we didn't need the money. It's right across route 120 from where Dan works, so we commute together. There is a free shuttle from my front door at work to the next town over from Grafton, so I have alternate methods for getting home should I need it. I can take classes at Dartmouth. I get discounts all over the Upper Valley for being an employee. It's great. Oh, and I work with movies, so no Netflix for us!!! I just can't believe how lucky I am.

We also now have 5 chickens. They wander around the yard squawking and fighting over bugs. I like watching them peck around. And they are oddly personable. Ugly, but endearing. I walk out the front door and if they aren't trying to bust their way into the house, they come running over to be my own personal feathered body guards.

Lastly, in our final stand in Massachusetts, we've decided to sell our house in Somerville. 2 of the 3 tenants are moving out on September 1, so it just made a lot of sense to bail out now. Unluckily, the market in Boston has already downturned and the process is slow going, but no matter what happens, we'll be fine just fine.

And so, several months later, I send this random assembly of thoughts to you with rough hands over high speed internet (weather permitting). Isn't the 21st century grand?