

IMAGES, IDEAS, and REFLECTIONS

Periodical Letter #33
October 2023

from
FREEMAN PATTERSON



Namaqualand in flower, 2023

Call it a hunch. In the middle of June I re-scheduled the only commitment I had for the middle of August. It had felt rather like a pebble in my shoe, so I emptied my shoe.

Shortly afterward, the messages and photos started coming from Namaqualand. The winter rains (May and June) had been the best in many years, long dry river beds were overflowing their banks, dams were filling and, as the weather warmed into July, the plants were growing rapidly. My friend Maryna Kohrs, co-owner of the Kamieskroon Hotel, wrote, "You've never seen Namaqualand greener." It seemed to me that her mother, Colla Swart (my long-time South African teaching partner and "partner in crime,") who died in May was summoning me to return at once, just as she had with a telegram away back in 1981. So, I heeded her call.

And, there was a second reason! By the time you read this I'll have turned 86. At my age, when opportunity clearly presents itself, I don't sit around on my butt having an argument with myself about "Should I or shouldn't I?" I move fast.

I called my dependable travel agent and within a day she had secured me a highly-discounted business-class ticket on Air Canada from Saint John to Toronto and on to London, then from London to Cape Town on British Airways. The low price of the ticket seemed like a confirmation that I'd made the right decision.

Because of the horror stories we've read about passenger's experiences on various air lines and because I like giving credit when and where credit is due, join me on a little side-trip en route to Namaqualand to hear another sort of story.

After I boarded the plane in Saint John, it sat on the tarmac for about 40 minutes because of a minor technical malfunction and I saw my two-hour space for connecting with my flight to London dwindle to just over one hour. Even though I was travelling only with carry-on, I realized that there was a very good chance I would miss my connection.

As I raced off the plane in Toronto and stepped inside the terminal, a quite elegantly dressed woman in her mid-40s stepped forward and asked me if I were "Mr. Patterson." When I replied in the affirmative, she said, "I'm here to take you to your international departure gate," and she opened a side door to a waiting Porsche.

I sat quite dumbfounded as she drove me through alleys and bi-ways of the huge airport, finally stopping in front of another door and saying, "This is your departure gate, just go through the door and upstairs and you'll be able to board your plane to London immediately." As I climbed out of the car I simply had to ask, "What did I do to deserve this?" and she replied, "Air Canada likes to take good care of its passengers who pay a little more."

Obviously Air Canada has a program in place that scans the passenger list of delayed flights for business-class passengers who are in danger of missing a connection and endeavours to make sure that doesn't happen. It probably even knows the passenger's age. If so, the program undoubtedly has me flagged as being in "desperate need" of assistance.

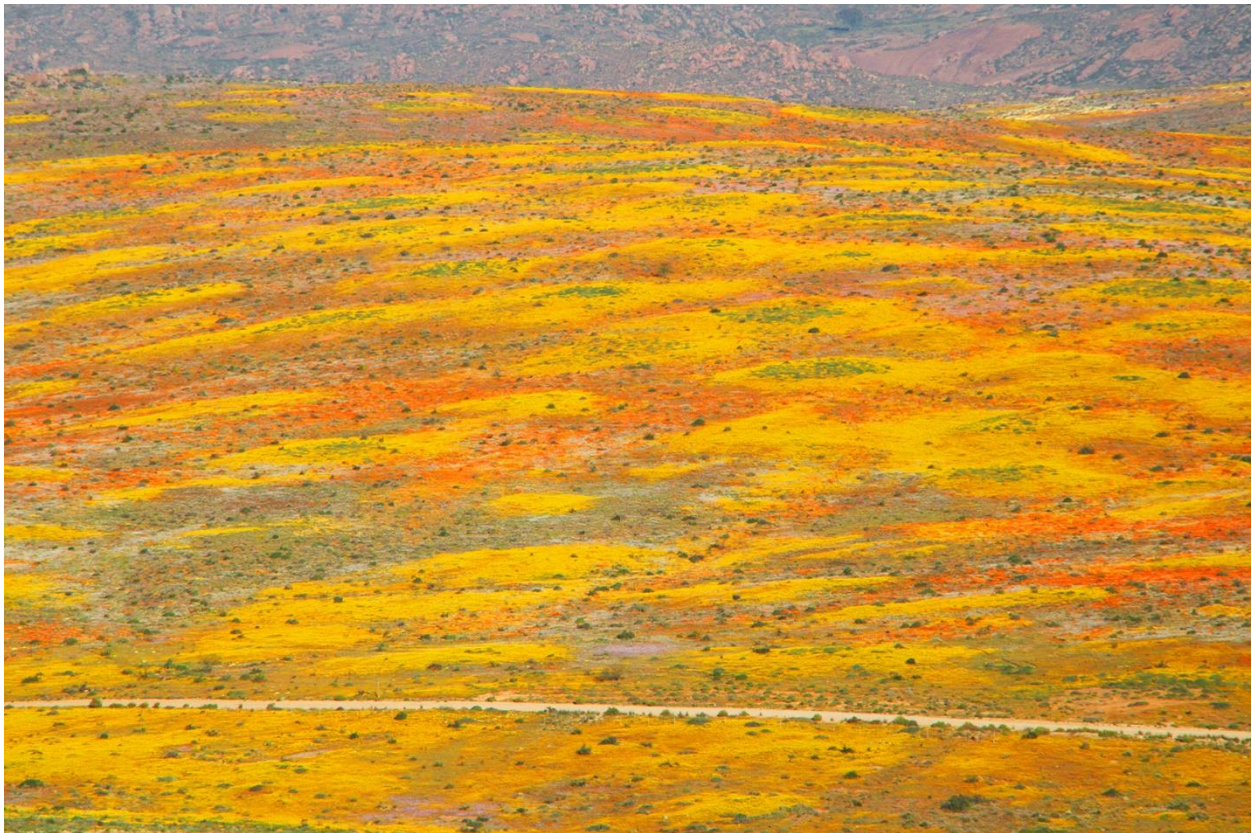
So, I boarded the plane, climbed into my pod, was served a delicious meal, then put my seat into lie-flat position and slept my way to London. Once on the British Airways flight, I slept eight more hours en route to Cape Town. Positively no jet lag on arrival!

Two of Helmut Kohr's nieces were waiting for me in Cape Town and immediately the three of us headed north. Five hundred kilometres and six hours later we were having dinner

at the Kamieskroon Hotel, while outside and toward the sea a rare SUPERBLOOM was already underway and waiting to be photographed.

My minimum stay during Namaqualand's flower season is always two weeks, and six weeks is better, as there are innumerable country roads to explore, especially in a year like this. The bloom usually begins in the lowveld (low country) and traverses a landscape awash with brilliant hues, gradually moving up the Kamiesberge (Kamies mountains) to the highveld, where it can linger for weeks depending on the weather.

However, I was among the few to witness this relatively unknown wonder of the world, as Namaqualand is considered remote even today. Few people consider coming to visit for more than a couple of days and certainly most days this year I passed other vehicles only occasionally. I felt so sorry in one way, but loved the solitude.



The relative absence of visitors reminded me of how frequently people make plans they are unprepared to change when nature's timing does not coordinate with theirs. For example, sometimes a neighbour insists that I phone when my rhododendron garden reaches its annual crescendo, but if I call on Wednesday the answer may well be, "Oh, I'm tied up until Monday, but I'll come then." By Monday, of course, the peak has passed. Nature does not operate on a human schedule and when we try to make it fit, we'll often be disappointed.

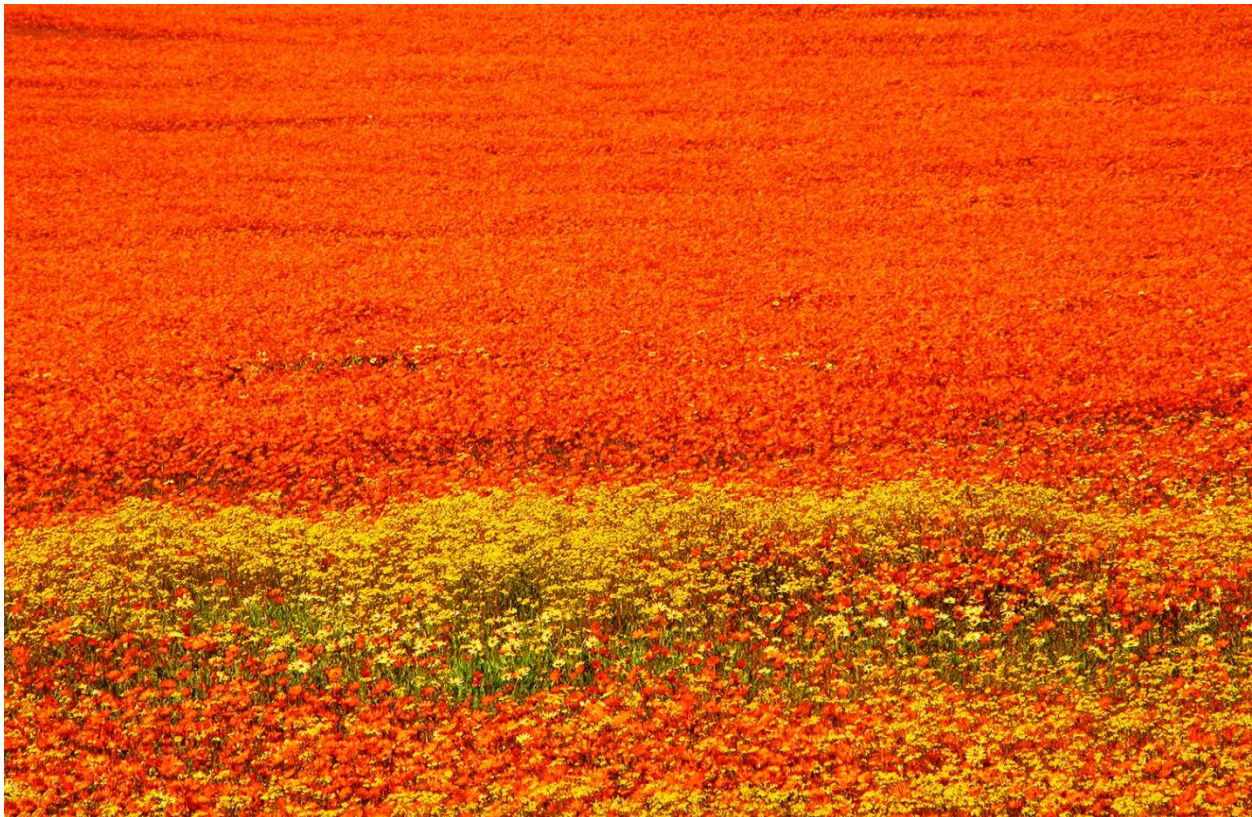
The greater question is why we will so quickly postpone experiencing the beautiful, often for menial or relatively unimportant tasks. Of course, we don't delay preparing for the danger of a hurricane or an extreme blizzard, a natural occurrence that threatens our comfort

or even our lives. Yet, putting off the experience of beauty, “the invisible embrace,” as John O’Donohue referred to it, is something of which we are all frequently guilty. Maybe we are naturally wired to recognize physical threats, but have allowed our wiring for recognizing spiritual opportunities to fall into disrepair.

To put it another way, what are our priorities? Do they need to be re-examined? It’s a question that I asked again and again as I stood alone on the sides of Namaqualand’s country roads scanning the vast sea of colour that stretched from my feet to the invisible distance.

What a gift!

However, the gift was far more than a breath-taking display of colour for human enjoyment; it was a graphic example of all of Nature co-operating. Every morning as the temperature rose, insects sensed the warmth and began to fly about in search of food (nectar) created in the flowers of plants, the flowers in turn realized they had customers and unfolded their petals, opening for business. And then, in just a few hours or maybe after several, the temperatures began to drop, fewer and few insects came to call, and with the exception of flowers that open for night-flying insects, the flowers closed up shop for the day.



You’ll see more grand sweeps of Namaqualand 2023 if you click on [SUPERBLOOM](#). Also, if you go to my web site and click on IMAGES, IDEAS, AND REFLECTIONS #26 (July 2022,) you’ll find images of bloom in previous years, both in the letter itself and in a hyperlink.

BOOKS

When I'm reading in my kitchen easy chair early in the morning or during the evening, Tess (two years old this month) is often lying across my feet. I used to wonder if she were uncomfortable, but then I realized that human contact is far more important to her than physical comfort. In fact, one day when I was away and the person supposed to look after her didn't, she became so lonely that she chewed up several pages of Harari's SAPIENS: A Brief History of Humankind. Obviously, she chose her book to satisfy her longing for people.

This happened just as I was finishing my journey through Harari's sequel, HOMO DEUS: A Brief history of Tomorrow. Although I wrote about these books in my periodical letters #29 and 32, I mention them again because of their sheer vastness and depth. They have caused me to re-think a number of critical personal and planetary issues.

I'm now ready to plunge into book #3, 21 Lessons for the 21st Century, but because Tess partly devoured SAPIENS... I decided to buy a new copy of that at the same time. However, I ended up purchasing the boxed set of three on Amazon for less than the price of two – a timely sale, of course. So, now I have a spare copy of HOMO DEUS... to use as a gift.

Speaking of gifts, over dinner one evening during my last workshop, Heather Rose, a participant from Halifax, and I started chatting about books – from novels to mysteries to non-fiction – and quickly discovered that we shared a deep love of Irish writers. Just a few days later another Amazon delivery arrived with Sarah Winman's A Year of Marvellous Ways, a gift from Heather. Winman is British, but I love the magic realism of her text, which reminds me strongly of the works of the Irish writer, Niall Williams, whose novel This Is Happiness, riveted me to my chair. Just to tantalize you, Marvellous Ways is an 89-year old woman and Mary Winman's smash-hit debut novel was When God Was a Rabbit.

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FILM

A number of persons from outside Canada who have heard about the 44-minute film, FREEMAN PATTERSON: The Universe Is Unfolding As It Should, have queried me about access. The film, which aired nationally on the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation on August 12, was uploaded to CBC Gem at the same time.

As the CBC has full broadcasting rights until August 12 next year, people living outside of Canada will be unable to watch the film until then, unless they have a VPN blocker. However, the director of the film has asked if he can create a password-protected link that will enable non-Canadians to view the film for a limited period of time. If/when permission is granted, I will let you know. Canadians can lick on <https://gem.cbc.ca/absolutely-canadian/s23> or <https://gem.cbc.ca/absolutely-canadian?autoplay=1> and scroll down until the film title appears, then click on that.

The film, directed by Scott Munn and dedicated to Colla Swart, was shot at Shampers Bluff and in Namaqualand and financed by the CBC with support from the National Film Board of Canada, the Province of New Brunswick, Arts NB, The Beaverbrook Art Gallery, and the Sheila Hugh Mackay Foundation.



Tess celebrates her second birthday this month and, when she isn't eating books about people or lying across my feet while I'm reading, she's very likely surveying her world.

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AUTUMN Revised

Autumn in the northern hemisphere ends, theoretically, on December 21, but for virtually all Canadians the reality is very different. Many have already endured weeks of winter.

When I was a child here in southern New Brunswick, snow faithfully blanketed the ground around the middle of November and a white Christmas was guaranteed. However, when I was about 13 or 14, it rained on December 10, a shocking absolute first and a harbinger of things to come.

If snow falls in November these days, it is usually long gone by December and some years our first major blizzard sweeps in after Christmas, maybe even after New Year's Day. Personally, I'm all in favour of this iteration of climate change, as selfish as it is, as I love the long drawn-out season that autumn has become.

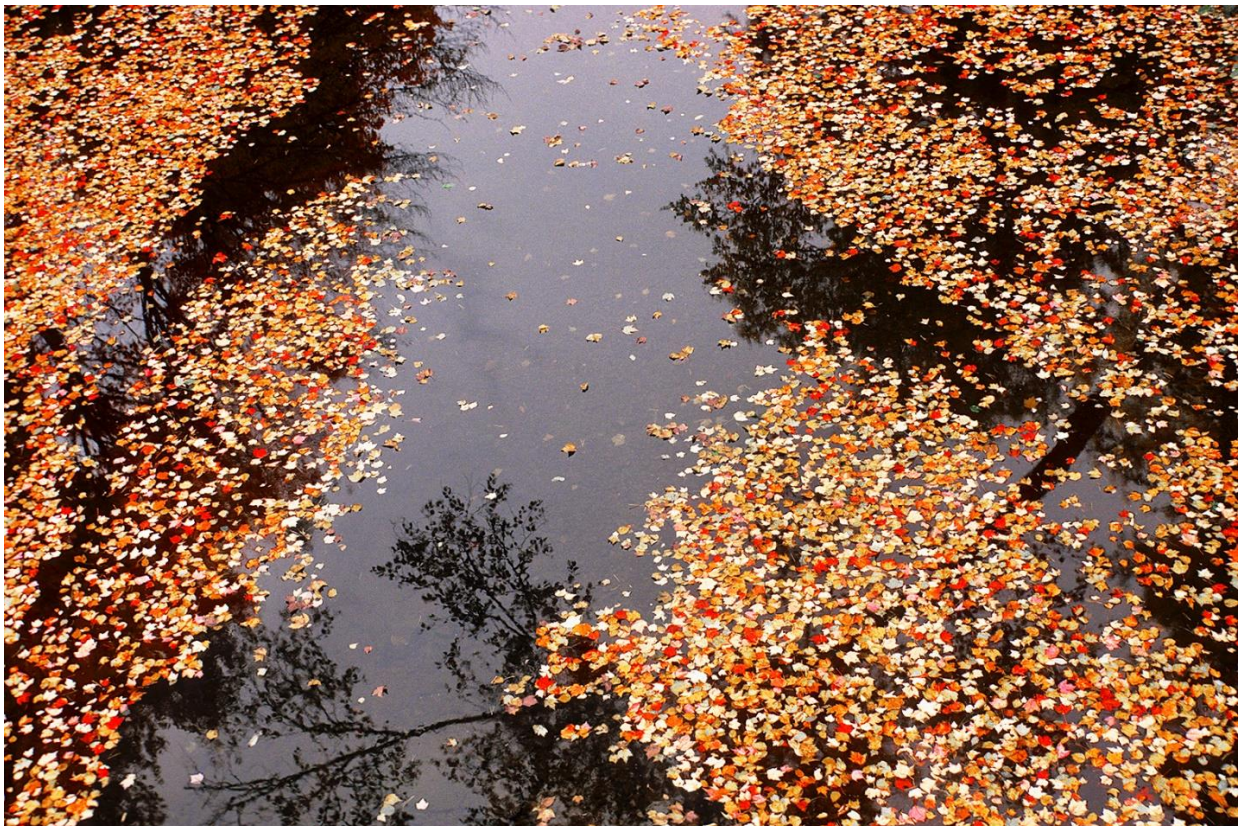
For me, it's not just a matter of being able to get around easily; rather, it has something emotionally fundamental to do with plants and with colour.

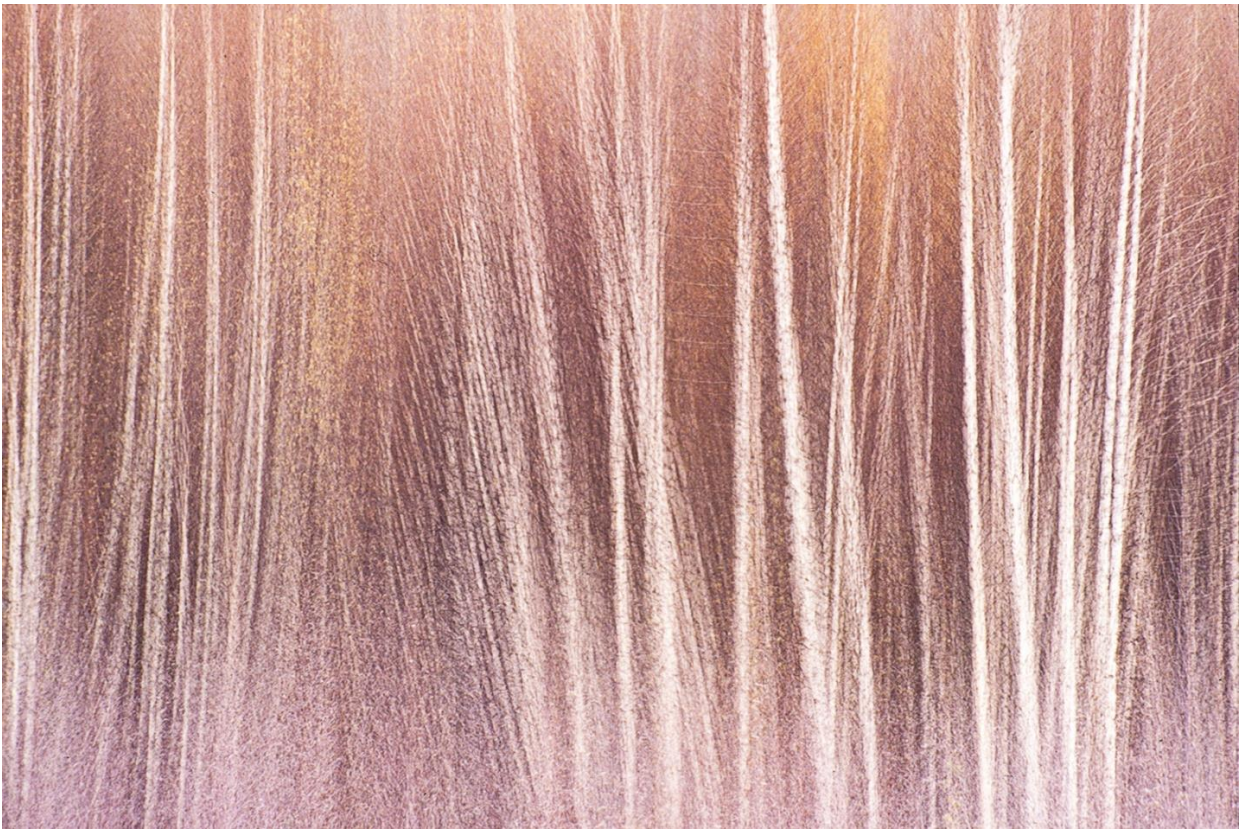
I can now observe plants – both wild and cultivated – as they age, not immediately covered with a white shroud. That matters to me, as my emotional connection to the

botanical world developed early; by the age of eight I was creating my first flower garden. Excited by the garden scenarios I was imagining, I spent Januarys lying in a hayloft in our barn thumbing through the Dominion Seed House catalogue for hours on end, until toward the end of the month I finally settled on the six or seven kinds of flower seeds I wanted to buy.

When it comes to colours, as much as I enjoy the primary hues, I've always responded deeply to browns expressed through the full tonal range, especially when brown is intermixed with desaturated blues, rich magenta-purples, middle greys, and occasionally accented with a late flush of yellow, orange, or red.

In short, bring on late autumn, that magnificent time that follows the grand colour crescendo! Or, to switch continents, Namaqualand offers me a similar experience expressed in a different way; the SUPERBLOOM, like the brilliant hues of an eastern Canadian autumn, does not last forever. Here are a few late fall images from around my New Brunswick home.







“To everything there is a season”
Book of Ecclesiastes (the BIBLE)

Thank you for your letters!

One of the reasons that I decided to create IMAGES, IDEAS, and REFLECTIONS back in 2018 was the large volume of mail that I was receiving and the difficulty I had in replying. Although my periodical letter has generated even more mail, I'm very glad I made that decision.

My initial thought was that the main benefit of the letter would be keeping informed everybody who cared to know what I was thinking and doing. However, from the beginning an unexpected, but equally valuable benefit emerged – meeting strangers, who no longer seemed like strangers once I'd read their letters to me.

So, I want EVERYBODY to know that while I would like to reply to every letter I receive, sometimes it takes me a long while and other times it's simply impossible.

As you know, I'm anything but retired. I still love facilitating workshops in St. Martin's and St. Andrew's and occasionally abroad and, although I have terrific help, I also spend a great deal of time working in my large rhododendron-and-azalea garden. It even needs winter attention from time to time and always is a way of getting great physical exercise. I invariably have other projects "on the go" as well, so giving myself time for reading, thinking, listening to music, and being present wherever I am provides much-needed balance. Quiet time alone is vital and Tess instinctively recognizes these times and ceases her demands for my attention.

Thank you for your letters and your caring, and for your understanding if my reply comes in the form of a long delay or silence. FREEMAN

My best to all! Mes meilleurs vœux à tous! Beste wense, almal!

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