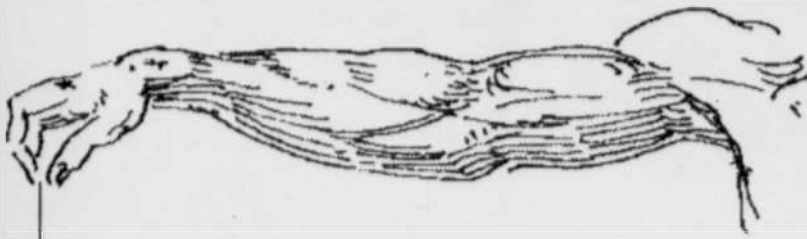


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Alternative: Straying from what is considered normal: different; the choice between two mutually exclusive possibilities. To say, "I am alternative," is to say, "I am leading a different lifestyle from mainstream society: honoring diversity, building community and creating a lifestyle that promotes the health and well-being of our planet."

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AMAZON TRAIL

Home turf

As the For Sale sign begins to fade with age, these house sellers reconsider their aversion to lawns

by Lee Lynch

OK, the real estate market is soft. The right buyer hasn't come along. I have to learn patience. Things will pick up when the kids get out of school. Yes, yes, I've heard all that realtor talk. I know the perfect person is just around the corner.

But I still feel like a teenager moping around the phone, crazed with hope that a girlfriend will call. The phone rings and, damn, it's just some dear friend. Could you please e-mail in the future? Or else be ready for my obsessive laments: No one has looked at the house for a week, or made an offer, or had their loan denied!

If it's a realtor who wants to show our show-place, I'm transformed to something between the most charming, good-natured dyke in the world and a slaving mendicant.

I've become a Squeaky Wheel. I'm determined to motivate, push, harass and annoy our poor realtor so he'll find a buyer just to get me out of his heretofore peaceful life. I besiege him with

So I flit around the house, rag in hand, or try to work. If I'm out on the road escaping the whole thing, I do my best to pay attention to driving, not selling. I'm ambushed by hope time after time after time after...

I go for a walk when the buyers arrive, and as we pass, I check them out for signs that they've bonded with the driveway. I strain my ears for oohs and ahs. When they leave I—as subtle as the sun on a hundred-degree day—scrutinize their faces.

Lover and I have it down to a science. Last weekend I came in from shopping for yet more household cleansers, waxes, polishes. Before I could even ask, she said, "They stayed four and a half minutes." Bad news.

Last night when she called home from her job she asked, "So did you sell our house today?"

"Ten minutes."

Ten minutes isn't an absolute no, they might bring back a husband or lover. Twenty-five min-



utes to half an hour is better, with questions on the way out.

The most frequent feedback I pummel out of our realtor has nothing to do with the house. It's the land. Pine, oak, madrone, glorious wildflowers. Deer trails, wild turkey roosts, a cool dell. The runoff creek, mountain views and perfect bird habitat. We never cleared a thing, because to us this was the animals' land first. The realtor advertises our place as Peaceful Seclusion.

What do buyers want? A LAWN.

After four tortured months we demanded that the realtor suggest how to make the perfect setting more perfect. Our principles wavered. Out came the saws, the clippers, the loppers, the weed-whacker, the long-idle lawnmower.

Sunday the rototiller arrived with Ed and Rick of B&B Gardens. "Some of the wildflowers will survive this," promised Ed with the sincere sympathy of a physician announcing that your second lung is fine. Rick reassuringly reeled off names of deer-proof plants.

The phone rings. I leap. It's the realtor, returning my call about the 10-minute buyer. No go. I sigh, go outside to redirect the sprinkler, come back to my computer soggy with spray, hope drowned.

Maybe we'll put in Astroturf so we can get our peaceful seclusion.

All this is nothing, though, to the emotional roller coaster of anticipation. I tell myself not to get my hopes up. This works for about 35 seconds. I tell myself to be positive. This works for about 25 more seconds. I fling myself to my knees and whimper a dozen "pleases" to the Goddess. This doesn't work at all.