

TOM LICHATOWICH

Grateful for the gift of gardening

BY ROBIN SCHAUFFLER ■ CONTRIBUTING WRITER

"I think my favorite plant to grow is lettuce. Lettuce is very energetic, germinates quickly, and adds so much to the harvest with very few inputs," Tom Lichatowich muses.

This is how Lichatowich talks: garden vegetables have character, like people do, and his language is sprinkled with terms he learned in decades of a career in fisheries management.

He is a slim man of modest, good-humored demeanor, with a serious round face and graying hair. His voice is measured, low key. He's not making speeches. He often lets his sentences trail off, once he's launched the main idea. The listener gets where it's going, so why keep talking? He

husbands his words the way he husbands the materials he uses in his garden. No waste. No fancy inputs. His words, though, throw out bold challenges to many of our society's assumptions.

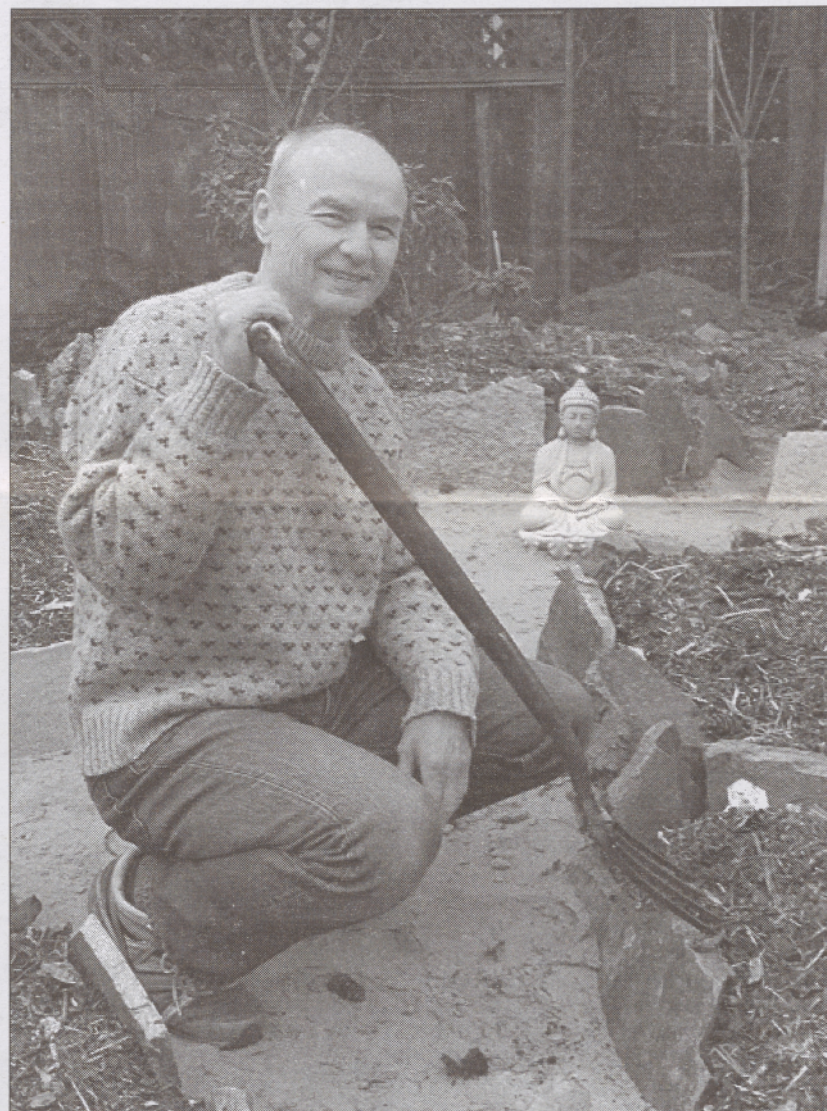
"My thinking is that organic produce is really overpriced. I look at what I can grow, and just in my little plots here, we could feed two more

families of four." He aims this comment at the health food stores, the purveyors of organic produce, the whole fresh-local-sustainable movement.

Then he apologizes. Amid all the shouting and arm-waving of our times, he is steadily polite, balanced: "Maybe I don't quite understand. I'm not a commercial organic farmer, haven't done the large-scale farming, marketing but is organic produce so high-priced," he wonders, "because they can get that much?"

Lichatowich can go on Google Earth and see the fish farms in Fiji where he worked as a Peace Corps volunteer in the 1960s. He sounds wistful, like he misses those long-ago hardworking days. More than 50 years later, it remains fresh in his mind.

Although he grew up in a gardening family, Fiji may have been where he became a gardener-for-life. He absorbed the Fijian gardening ethic. The fish farms used no pumps, no pellet feeding, no chemicals; he learned to use tidal flows and organic fertilizer. He admired the way Fijians farmed the land, too: "The people there gardened not for the pleasure. In the village you have to have a garden, for subsistence,"



PHOTOS BY ROBIN SCHAUFFLER

Tom Lichatowich's years growing up in Indiana and his time with the Peace Corps in Fiji brought him to the pensive, deep-rooted gardening philosophy he embraces today in Portland.

he says. "They were poor people. They didn't use a lot of inputs." He uses the word "inputs" to mean equipment and materials you have to spend money to bring in, things you add to the natural garden to make it produce more: irrigation systems, wood frames, structures.

But long before Fiji, Lichatowich had

what he described as "a relationship with the soil." Growing up in South Bend, Ind., he was one of nine children, and his parents kept a huge garden. All the kids worked, and cousins and neighbors would come by for produce: strawberries, tomatoes, pumpkins, whatever was in season. The garden, he says, "seemed crucial to what

NOTHING
makes me **MORE**
HOPEFUL

than discovering
another human being to admire.

— ALICE WALKER —

The **NOTHING MORE HOPEFUL** series that begins this issue originates from a workshop taught by Martha Gies. "Last fall, as I tired of hearing the ISIL Hour, interrupted only occasionally by a warning about Ebola's imminent arrival in Europe or the U.S., it occurred to me that the media was deaf to good news," Gies says. "I remembered my friend Sr. Rosarii Metzgar once telling me she believed all the terrible news with which we are daily battered must surely be offset by small and unseen acts of good." Gies resolved to enlist some writers who would hunt down and write those stories.