Whimsical Thoughts in Suburbia

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Five pounds of pre-formed steel swung in an arc above my head. Muscles down my back quivered with effort; the axe in my hands chewed the ground below my feet into gravel fit for any rock garden. I was digging through what our site leader called compact limestone, gravel and dust mixed by the light breezes characteristic of early morning combined with water from the last rainy season and dried by the same June sun baking every piece of skin exposed to its rays. Trenches ran from below four trailers placed on the left side of the main road into the park; twenty other trailers sat facing them across the dusty strip of land. Connecting the last four trailers to running water and sewer lines was one step in the process of making them ready for several families that would move into each three-bedroom, one-bath trailer.

I would count ten forceful swings that sent small pieces of rock flying and hand the pick to my friend Chris Anderson, who would then take ten swings and send entire rocks flying. At 215 pounds and able to bench press 345 pounds, he kept up with me. The five yard trench ran a foot deep and took us five hours to carve from the ground.

I was in Immokalee, Florida. The Southwest part of Florida has been hit by many hurricanes in the past four years: Charley, Francis, Ivan, Jeanne, Dennis, Henry, Wilma, and most widely recognized Katrina. In Florida, where Mickey and the sun reign supreme, where grandparents retire to rest their joints, there are people who have been devastated. Brightly colored single-wides painted pink and yellow and green decorated a dilapidated trailer park. Steaming tin roofs let in the sun and torrents of rain through gaping holes. Vehicles outside the homes showed little sign of misuse or maltreatment; the people cared lovingly for the only thing that would help their family to escape from the next hurricane: their car.

When the entire length of our trench had been dug out, we rested; the tongue of the nearest trailer in the shade was