

I saw people on the sidewalk, watching something. Then, the crowning achievement –barbed wire. For thirty –six years I worked for different groups, promoting world government, setting up conferences on pacifism, raising money, stuffing envelopes. You've seen fishermen mending the rips in their nets. People had to lug their own water, in buckets or mild jugs or soda containers. With a few expectations, the blacks on one side, the whites on another, the Central Americans and Asians toward the back. The word "paradise" came out of my mouth, without thinking. The woman looked at me strange. It's a hobby with me, studying words. I looked at the three walls surrounding the lot, then at a garden coming up beautiful, planted there close to the sidewalk. It means "walked park". I've just switched battlefields, from the entire planet to this corner of Cleveland. I start up conversations inlines and on the bus and with cashiers. People see I'm friendly, no matter what they've heard about whites or Jews. So I hired a teenager, Puerto Rican, who said he knew where he could get a shovel. We finally compromised on pumpkins, after I explained how much he could probably get for them a Halloween, not to mention the advantages of staying out of jail. Squatting there in the cool of the evening, planting our seeds, a few other people working, a robin singing out strong all the while, it seemed to me that we were in truth in Paradise, a small Garden of Eden. Water is heavy as bricks, trust me. And new seeds have to be always moist. People bent over like coolies, walking sometimes three or four blocks, a gallon jug in each hand, complaining all the time about the water. Mine I had hauled by a third–grader with a wagon. They emptied their ashtrays out the windows and tossed out all sorts of stuff. Some people started worrying, looking ahead to ripe beans and tomatoes and thinking about strangers coming in. That week, a man put chicken wire around his garden, five feet high, complete with a little gate and padlock. God, who made Eden, also wrecked the Tower of Babel, by dividing people. Men in jumpsuits, from the jail I think, were clearing the lot. Sometimes I think I've actually had more effect on the world since I retired. Sewing up the rips in the neighborhood. He worked that soil until it flowered through your fingers like silk. A duck gives birth to a duckling, not a moose. He showed up, saw his couch had been taken, and started ripping out people's plants. I crossed to join them, like a cat who smell herring. "paradise" comes from a Persian word. I smiled back. That's my occupation. A real businessman. Unbelievable.