

One of the springtime rituals I try to observe involves making a walking tour of the woods on Coe Creek Farm and adjoining family property to look at the May wildflowers. I like to walk the area more than once if I can find time, because seeing the early bloodroot flowers means I may not see the later wildflowers. But, this year, I never found a good time to take this little solitary journey.

This week, instead, we walked the fence through my cousin's property where we pasture cattle and through our own Speicher Woods. Fencing isn't a particularly easy or pleasant job, but it is a necessary one. The black flies had started to show up, there were some mosquitoes, and, in spite of the dry weather, some of the terrain was boggy and soggy, so we were wearing boots.

But, there were compensations even beyond getting the fence in order so it would confine the cattle. In Merrie's north Lee Woods I bent many times as I examined more closely a profusion of starflowers. These delicate seven-petaled white blooms surrounded by the larger stars made of their green leaves were scattered all over that woodsy area. This little flower is the provincial flower of Värmland, where Runo was born and grew up, and it is popularly depicted on goods from pottery to linens. That almost made up for my lack of an earlier visit to the woods.

My task on this fencing job was to walk along the brushy fenceline, cutting shrubby growth that might impede the electric wires. It isn't a hard job, but the brush nippers seem to get heavier as the day wears on, and the fence line seems longer.

I was just at the corner of the line fence between the Speicher Woods and the Lee Woods when I lowered the sharp tool to cut a bit of brush. I nearly closed the handles, cutting the bush and anything else in the path. Then, I noticed that there was a perfect Jack-in-the-Pulpit I would have quickly beheaded. I pulled back and admired the lovely plant. It was on Merrie's side of the fence, and another grew close by. Later, I saw two more Jacks in our own woods. The foamflowers had finished blooming, though the dry remains were still there. There were still violets that were lush and plentiful, too. The rest of the spring flowers had finished their blooming for this year.

But, it was enough. To see the peace of the flower growth beneath the big, unruly brush and trees seemed a metaphor for a lot of life. So often, we nearly cut that Jack-in-the-Pulpit unintentionally while going for bigger prey. And we don't even know

what we have done until it is too late.