

The Ravines of the North Shore

Appreciating Beauty, Preserving Function

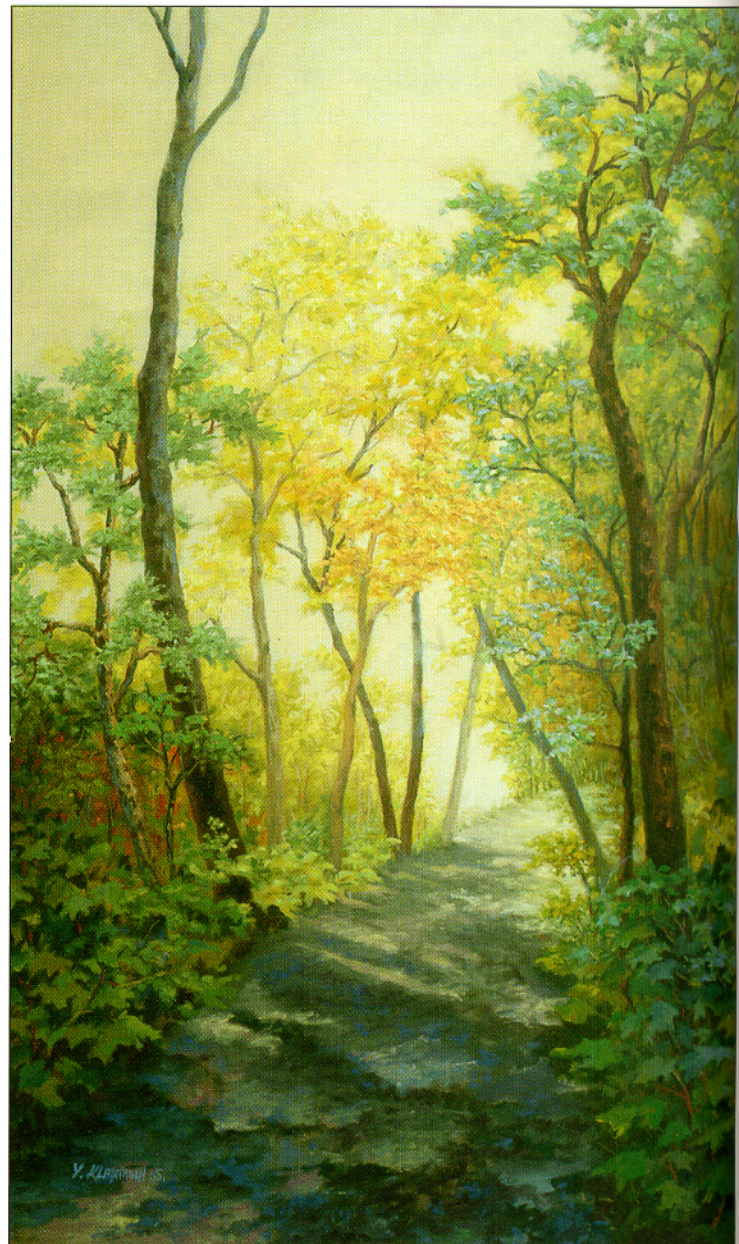
Christine Mason is CEO of Adexs, Inc., in Chicago. She has lived in Highland Park for 16 years, is the mother of four, writer and vinyasa yoga instructor. She holds a BA and MBA from Northwestern University and is an advocate of the arts and naturalism.

The deep ravines that run from Winnetka to Lake Bluff are essential parts of the North Shore's natural beauty. All seasons in the ravines delight: trillium carpeting the woods in spring, summer in full effect, the last red maple leaf of October, the frosted branches of winter. They possess a serene grandeur appealing to all the senses.

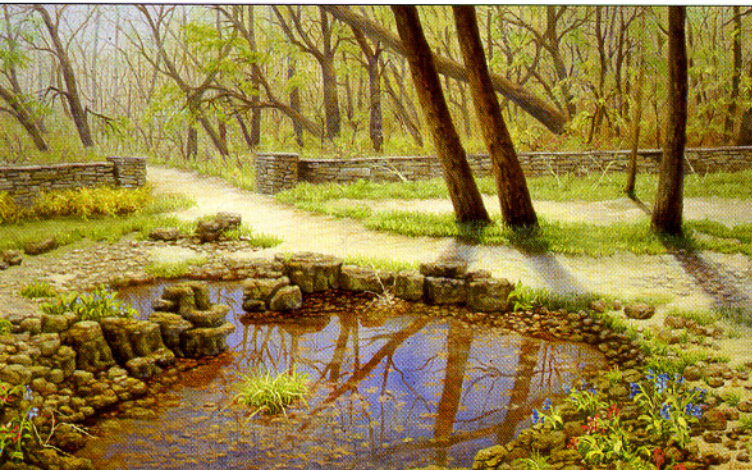
Sometimes, our desire to live surrounded by this beauty conflicts with the negative impact our presence can have on the natural environment. The ravine ecosystem, for example, is the major drainage system from the highlands and bluffs left by the retreat of the glaciers 10,000 years ago. Ravine erosion increases pollution in Lake Michigan and threatens the very properties we were so eager to build.

Before rapid development of the communities on the bluffs, the ravines were stable. Larger houses, as well as higher overall urbanization levels, have led to more water run-off and drainage. As a result, the ravines have been rapidly destabilizing.

Edgar Joves, Acting City Engineer for Highland Park, says that it is not only those who live directly on the ravines who should care. "All residents should care about the collapsing ravines," Joves says. "Ravine collapses cause pollution. They push the soil to the lake, sometimes breaking sewage and drainage pipes, and pollute the lake.



Summer Light, Ravine Drive, 3' x 5'



Ravine Drive / Millard Park, Oil, 5' x 3'

This contributes to overall water quality and to beach closings." The city, like all communities along the North Shore, is working on keeping the flow to the lake clean, both through water management and ravine protection.

Many kinds of ravine remediation are being attempted. In addition to various public agency initiatives, there are several private landscaping and consulting firms who advise and implement ravine reinforcement solutions, to slow further erosion. Reinforcement can be done through a variety of steel and stone structures. Experiments using man-made materials, as well as natural approaches involving vegetation and strategic planting, are also underway. To find out more about the natural history of the efforts, and to see how you can contribute to current efforts to support the ravines and shorelines, the following organizations provide online resources:

- For guidelines on minimizing damage to the ravines, especially if you're a homeowner, the City of Highland Park Lakefront Commission web site has practical suggestions, ranging from sprinkler guidelines to how to slope your driveway just right: <http://www.cityhpil.com/govern/-dept/commdev/minimizedamage.html> (take out the hyphen when typing into your address bar)
- A natural history of the area: www.illinois.sierraclub.org
- An overview of Great Lakes water management: www.glc.org

Ravine Inspirations

Yelena Klairmont and I have been observing Highland Park's ravines, parks and beaches for 17 years, with our seven children, with dogs and assorted others, in every season, at all times of day. We watch for the first signs of changing seasons, smelling the air. We look for sand critters and wood critters and teach our children the names of plants and trees.

Need a good cry or a good calming? The steady pace of life in the ravines is comforting and lends perspective. The ravines hold man-made treasures, too; for example, Jens Jensen's council rings are often tucked where even the

January, by Christine Mason

*Out here in the exhilarated smell of winter is freedom
The lid has lifted off the world and let the heat escape
Leaving only the crisp blue sky as its calling card*

Even as the northern world is ruminating; it still invites you in

*"Come one, come all,
To the amazing full sensory surround sound theater of the
undomesticated world!"*

*Yes! Come! Come out of your house
You there, grab a child!*

*Depose midwinter's mandate to rest and burrow and turn
to hearth and home*

*Instead, join this quiet surprise party: the snowbanks'
glitter fields*

*Are prisms red, green, lavender as the morning light
slants in, almost flat.*



January, Oil, 5' x 3'

owners of the land do not see them. How unique and lovely our ravines are, yet you'd be surprised how few people you encounter in the woods and on the beaches.

Yelena has turned her painterly eye to the local ecosystem. Her most recent series, 30 paintings of the bluffs and ravines, was created over a three-year period. She is represented by the Illinois State Artisan Gallery, Chicago. Three major paintings are currently on loan to the Highland Park Public Library for exhibit through next year. Other works can be seen at Gallery 60035, the Highland Park artists' co-op (www.gallery60035.com), and at www.yelenaklairmont.com.

Support the work of the Friends of Jens Jensen, 461 Burton Ave., HP, 60035, and the Lakeshore Commission (www.cityhpil.com/govern/comm/-lakefront.html) to extend and enhance the enjoyment of this wonderful ecosystem.



Jensen Bridge, Oil, 5' x 4'