

# Pink tulip dares to be different among daffodils

By Sherri Gardner Howell  
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A friend of mine was in town recently, visiting from Kentucky. Knoxville is one of her homes as well, so she was talking with pride about how beautiful the drive was along Pellissippi Parkway to my house, especially with the daffodils that grace the byway in full bloom.

We talked about the late Maria Compere, who was the driving force behind the planting of more than 1.5 million daffodil bulbs along Pellissippi and about how we are still blessed by one person's vision of beauty.

I seem to spend a lot of time on the parkway, as it is a direct route to most places I'm going, so I especially enjoy the seas of buttercup yellow and creamy white waving at me from the sidelines.

And then there is that occasional misfit — that one spot of another color in the sea of yellow that draws your eye for a double-take. There is one this year — a lone pink tulip standing proudly amongst its brothers and sisters, who are all dressed in yellow and white. With the radio off and my AT&T "Don't Text and Drive" app turned on, the pink tulip prompted a few minutes of self-reflection.



I think we all have times when we feel like that tulip. Growing where it was planted, however inadvertently, the little tulip is a misfit in its aloneness. Were it in a grouping, a cluster, it might look different. But just one stalk, one bit of "other" color in a planned landscape, it just doesn't fit. It may be beautiful in its own right, but because of where it is, it stands out not for its beauty, but for its oddity.

In today's climate of polarizing beliefs and high tensions, it doesn't take much to foster that feeling of aloneness. Whether we are expanding a political or moral belief that goes against the current grain of conversation, whether we feel we are too tall or short or skinny or fat or "too" anything, there are times when it seems everyone around us is dressed in the uniform of the day, and we are just a bit off-kilter.

I think about my mother when I wax philosophical about the pink tulip. More correctly, I think about the woman who was my mother, about Mary Frances Ward Pruitt Gardner, a young woman in her mid-30s, twice widowed, living back in her small, Southern hometown, raising two children.

I know my mother often felt like a pink tulip in a world of yellow daffodils, a single in a world where everything was done in twos. I know she was often lonely for my father and for the life that died when he did — the world of an Air Force captain and his beautiful wife, transient yet tied to other young couples moving and raising families in the same world. It was the late 1950s, and the U.S. was at peace. She had coffee with the officer's wives, planned parties at the club, sat on the porch in a neighborhood that catered to "the military," comparing notes and news with other daffodils, all tranquil and uniform in a comfortable time.

My mother wasn't a trendsetter or a rebel. She would not have chosen to be the pink tulip. She was a traditionalist, seeing her main duty and role as that of a mother raising two children, keeping the house in order, cooking the meals, taking care of her parents and brothers and sisters, nieces and nephews.

But she also had to make sure the mortgage was paid, the faucet didn't drip, and that the children, especially her headstrong daughter, were prepared for life's surprises.

I know there are many pink tulips out there who revel in their unique standing among the sameness around them. Blessings and power to them. But for those of us who just sometimes feel a little pink in a world of yellow, it's OK. You are adding to the scene around you in your own way, and all the yellow daffodils are made more noticeable because you are here.