

Berserk in autumn wood

By Eithne Ruan
New York Staff Writer

The first time I saw the autumn leaves of an eastern wood, I went berserk.

While my New York friends watched and chuckled amongst themselves, I ran around in a grove of tall trees on Long Island, picking up orange leaves, red leaves, brown leaves, chestnut leaves, yellow leaves, and, in between much, I shouted to the trees how beautiful they were.

My friends reminded me that I had just told them that Southern California did NOT have seasons, that we at the Golden Gate got out our big raincoats and boots during winter just like them.

The women they had said you don't have the leaves.

It was true, I was feeling out, we don't have the leaves. Not like the mad as Long Island I was now ranting would be, anyway. For a week I collected a few bunches of leaves every day and mailed them home to my mother in Santa Barbara. I wanted to give her an idea of what autumn on Long Island was like.

Meanwhile, the neighbors in Upper Bay, unimpressed by the raking, stacking and burning of their fallen leaves, heard of my collecting mania and came over to ask if I would

do my collecting in their yards. They said they would provide the manure for mulling and in fact, suggested that I join about half a dozen of their many plastic bags already stuffed with leaves. Most of each bag were all one color in every yard and the leaves said they'd be very happy indeed to get rid of the bags — for fuel, garbage truck or whatever.

In addition to the leaf collecting, I was taking hundreds of pictures of the trees, tying on my back in the woods and looking up through the riot of autumnal colors to the blue sky beyond. No one at home would believe the amateur photos spoke of autumn. I was certain, as I had to capture it all in film.

I was so sure that there is no way that amateur photographers, anyway, to capture the changing-leaves phenomenon with a camera. My pictures may as well have been taken in black and white.

But the autumn was serious, along with the color, by my mother. She had taken much mulling of the leaves, glad there to be an art form, and by the time I went to school for they were frozen and hanging on a wall. Something in the glue had preserved their color, looking for a time the process by which they would all turn brown. The wall-collage, in fact, contained multi-colored 30 months, and it was with great surprise one morning that we noticed the wall-collage had turned a uniform brown overnight.

My mother's friends had been so amused with her making the wall-collage as my New York friends had been with my collecting, something everyone was trying so desperately to get rid of.

But after the whole exercise was over I couldn't dispute any longer what my New York friends had been saying all along.

The leaves, we don't have the leaves.