

The 2022 Art, Essay and Poetry Invitational

Theme - "Love Begins with Me"

Essay Title – "A Prickly Opportunity – Tricia Sybersma

Location – Cayman Islands

A Prickly Opportunity

Let me introduce the wild blackberry patch on our farm. This patch was here way before we came along, tucked away in the middle of an old pasture. As we laid out the plan for our farm buildings, preserving the patch became my priority to show respect and gratitude for the land. The only way to achieve this was to build around the patch thus the wild blackberries became the focal point and center of activity for the entire property. All traffic including walking, driving, trucks, trailers, tractors, and horses flowed around the blackberry patch. I looked forward to my daily visits with the blackberries. Saying good morning and goodnight became my practice. As a result, I was first to notice the spring blossoms and to taste the berries.

Challenge

Have you ever seen a wild blackberry patch? Although I looked forward to the berries, the patch is true to its name. A wild mess of impenetrable thorny vines. Not a welcoming sight as the focal point of the farm! Every spring I was faced with the dilemma of how to tame the tangled vines. I tried many different approaches. I called in a specialist that suggested the extreme measure of cutting it all back to the roots which I did. Afterward I felt horrible then relieved when it grew back even thornier than before. Eventually I just accepted the wild patch and grew an appreciation for its unique qualities of self-expression and determination to thrive despite all I had done to it in an attempt to shape it into something else.

Hidden Treasures

Now that I had accepted the patch in all its thorny glory, I turned my attention to the area around it. If I can keep that tidy, then at least the patch will look cared for. As part of my walk to the barn, I pause for a few minutes to pull out stray weeds. This gave me the opportunity to check in with the blackberries, see the new growth and the stage of the berries without getting overwhelmed by the enormity of the wild mess. I noticed that there are two types of vines. The vines that blossom and vines that don't. These vines are thick, strong, and extra thorny. They grow fast and cover everything. I nicknamed them the runners because in addition to covering the vines that bloom, they travel out of the patch and across the driveway! I reached for my clippers to trim them as they seemed to be choking the blossoms. Then something unexpected happened. I

realized that these vines weren't choking the blossoms, they were protecting them. My heart sank, they are doing exactly what they are supposed to do, protect the blossoms and berries from the elements, birds, animals, and even from me. With a heart full of gratitude, I thanked the vines reassuring them that the blossoms were safe, and it is ok that I trim them. As I clipped and exposed the vulnerable pink blossoms my heart sank again because I suddenly realized that we do the same thing. We grow our own version of thorny vines to protect, cover and hide the most vulnerable part of us, our heart.

Let it Bloom

This experience had a profound effect on not only how I see the blackberry patch but also how I see myself and others. It is time to remove our thorns, uncover our heart and let it bloom. I am filled with gratitude for the blackberry patch. It is my daily reminder that It is not only the focal point of our farm, but also the heart of our home.

Bonus

Meaning of Blackberries

Purity of thought, protection, kindness, mental clarity, optimism, seeing goodness within oneself and others, inspirational, incisive, and direct, yet gentle in speech, offended by mistreatment of living things, environmental awareness, purification, letting go of what no longer serves you.