



MINDFUL GROWTH ON A WALK IN THE WOODS

Dear Friends —this Friday reflection is different. I have had some of our wonderful young people helping me in the past few years and for about a year now Jazmyne LeBeau has been my assistant. She is 21 and will shortly be leaving to continue her pilgrimage through life. She's a very strong young woman with excellent talents in a variety of artistic fields and will always be a member of the family here.

As you know, about 50 acres of our land has been dedicated by us to be forever wild and forever protected. It was clear-cut for timber around 1960. However, since it has been our privilege to be stewards of this land, the forest has been allowed to grow naturally, or “unmanaged” as the Europeans term it.

Many different ecologies have developed and at this time of year many wonderful things are sprouting from the earth. When Jazmyne mentioned that she was spending time looking at what was breaking forth in that forest, I asked her to take some pictures and to jot down some of the thoughts she

had on her ventures. What follows is the result. I hope you will find her words and pictures as inspiring as I did. — Brother Toby



It was exciting to journey through the forest to see what was coming up this time of year. Looking for wildflowers opens up the child in me. I wander along the forest floor, keeping my eyes open to all the wonders that surround me. I feel free to express any and all joy when discovering these magical spirits, because it is such a gift to witness nature coming alive in beautiful and unique ways.



WILD IRIS

I spotted some wild iris. Their bright green foliage almost camouflages them. They look so comfortable nesting amongst the young uncurling ferns, lush mosses, and dewy grasses, so I almost didn't catch a glimpse passing by.

I saw them again as I was heading up to a meditation spot. At the foot of the unmarked path to the hidden sanctuary, a small group of wild iris grew. I respected the space I was about to enter. I spoke my gratitude and continued along with that feeling, knowing Brother Toby admires these blue blooms. I couldn't help but acknowledge their love back, by protecting and honoring the contemplative space he built years ago.



TRILLIUM

One of the flowers I was hoping to see was trillium. I just discovered my love for spring woodland flowers last year walking through the Minnesota Landscape Arboretum, so I was hoping to set my eyes on the magical beings in Northern California's forest!

I was keeping my eyes open for anything small and colorful popping out of the ground and soon enough, a teeny tiny, dewed three-leafed spirit was growing right in the middle of the path - trillium!

It stood out against the layers of wet dried leaves and pines. No bloom, but I said hello and continued along the way, hoping to see some more. And sure enough, another trillium! No bloom though.

And there it was - in the morning light, a white trillium standing tall covered in raindrops, bloom wide open, though turned away from the



sun. I didn't feel worthy. I felt like I was intruding on its existence, but was in awe of the energy it exuded. I felt bad taking its photograph so I quickly walked away. But I felt a pull to go back. Why should I leave and not spend time with it? Take in its medicine, its lessons. I followed the tug and turned around, marched toward the trillium, got down on my stomach and pulled out my pen and paper.

Listening, asking questions, reveling in its strength, I lay face to face with the flower. And then, the sun broke through the trees, trickling down onto the forest floor, speckling us with light. It was a source of inspiration; a role model offering nothing but allowing me to be in its presence for a moment, taking in all I could. Then moving on.

DANDELIONS

I know dandelions are weeds to many people but they are some of the sunniest wild ones around! They just burst with so much yellow and light! And I am always so happy to see a little one waiting for the sun in a patch of clover. Hi! I see you! Hope you're doing well! The sun will come out soon! Keep shining!





LITTLE TINY FLOWERS

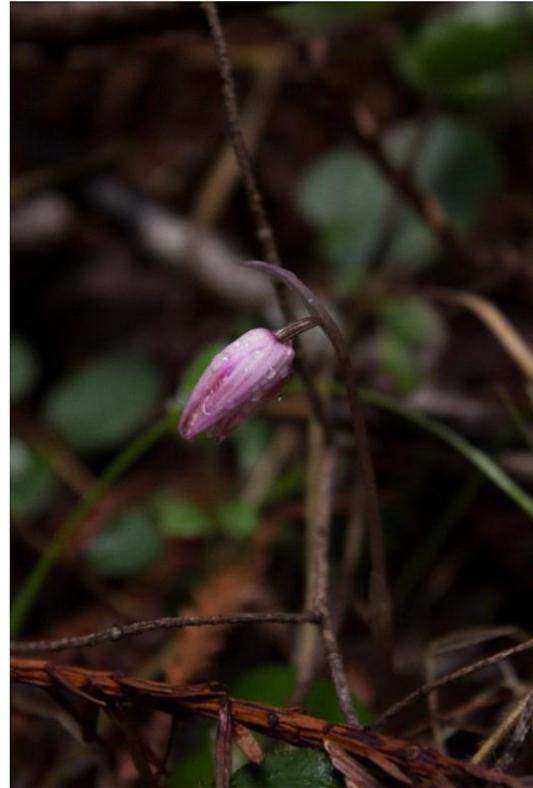
I love walking around through the vibrant grasses to come across little flowers. Just the other day my eyes were drawn to a sea of the teeniest, tiniest white flowers in front of me! To see things that bloomed so suddenly, with all the rain we had, it is such a gift and a joy to be experiencing their radiance flowering and soaking up the sun. These are the kind of flowers for the ants and spiders to enjoy.



YELLOW BUTTERCUPS

On my first weekend here, I spotted the willow tree lightly brushing some little flowers growing underneath it. I remember they had a light yellow resembling the colors of the willow leaves. They were scattered, poking out of the tall lime green grasses, speaking in a gentle voice enticing my curiosity. It wasn't until recently I followed the whispers and sat underneath the willow, admiring the little sanctuary it was providing for the wildlife below. I joined with the

buttercups as they swayed in the warm breeze, inhaling with gratitude and exhaling tenderness. Each one reminding me to pause, listen, be here for this moment, this lovely soft moment.



FAIRY SLIPPER

In a quiet grove of redwoods, I always feel I am in the presence of wise old teachers, so I bowed and walked across the thick bed of fallen needles. Then, I spotted a fleck of pink hidden among the needles. I dashed toward the bright speck and discovered a dewy pink flower growing out of a ditch. There was another soft pink flower near it too. I felt so lucky to have seen another woodland spring flower. They were so quiet, so calm, taking their time to open and grow. About a week later, I showed Brother Toby the image, wondering if he knew the flower. I assumed it was an orchid and he said they were called Fairy Slippers. I googled fairy slipper and viewed all these images

of these colorful flowers that I knew must have been it. Later that day, I went back, hoping to see them in full bloom. And there they were – bright! Fully open! Luminescent in the sun! They reminded me of how, although growing in maybe not the most luxurious or populated area, they are thriving and living their best life.



I honestly don't know what species of wildflowers are native or invasive to Northern California. But from walking out of the Starcross farmhouse greeted by a carpet of teeny tiny white flowers to finding pink orchids blooming out of the dark forest floor, I feel so lucky to experience each moment of this life with them — for all of it is beautiful.

All images taken by Jazmyne LeBeau

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