



It's A Weed

Nature's Hidden Treasures

by Mikell

As long as I can remember, I've been delighted with those unappreciated, second class citizens of the plant world referred to as "weeds". Oh, I enjoy a healthy blue green head of broccoli as much as anyone and I understand the pride in feeling responsible for the growth. And a formal flower garden is a treat for the eyes as well as the nose! But finding a plant that has survived on its own initiative without the coddling and special care given to the chosen garden varieties is a much greater joy for me!

When I was a child my grandmother's eyes would brighten

as she showed me a mullein stalk. “Remember the poem I read to you by James Whitcomb Riley? This might be the very stalk the fairies danced around!” What a treasure! It wasn’t a particularly attractive plant and yet it must be special to attract such an interesting array of imaginary characters!

“Queen Anne, Queen Anne, has washed her lace—she chose a summer’s day” and we were on our way toward a lacy flower that did look very much like lace fit for a queen. These weeds that are so often overlooked certainly keep fine company! Later I learned that another name for Queen Anne’s Lace is the

wild carrot. There's even more to the plant than meets the eye. There is something special hidden beneath the surface.

The hours I spent with my grandmother on the farm opened my eyes, and heart, to the pleasures of “weeds” and my appetite for learning about them has grown over the years. I'm not certain if it was a coincidence or just the way she looked at life, but one of her favorite sayings was

“You can't judge a book by its cover.”

By looking for the hidden qualities in nature's most misunderstood and unappreciated road side plants, maybe we can learn lessons that will help us recognize and value ourselves and others. If you discount something or someone because of a man-made label, you may miss a precious gift!

Everyone has value. It may not be apparent on the surface, but we are all here for a reason. The world will be far richer when we look for the assets, rather than the deficits, in ourselves and others. Oh, the damage we do with labels!

“Don’t ever judge anyone by your values”. One of the lessons my dad taught me was that I didn’t have the right to decide what other people should value. If it isn’t harming me or others, it is simply none of my business. Wasting my time and energy on something I can’t control is also a stressor that I can do without.

Labels of any kind are limiting. We may think that only negative stereotypes can limit, but we need to beware of “positive” labels as well. If you say that someone is “brainy” you may not consider that they are also athletic or artistic. We

tend to stop looking and listening once we have applied the label. When we make judgments about others, it limits our perceptions and it is a lose/lose situation for everyone.

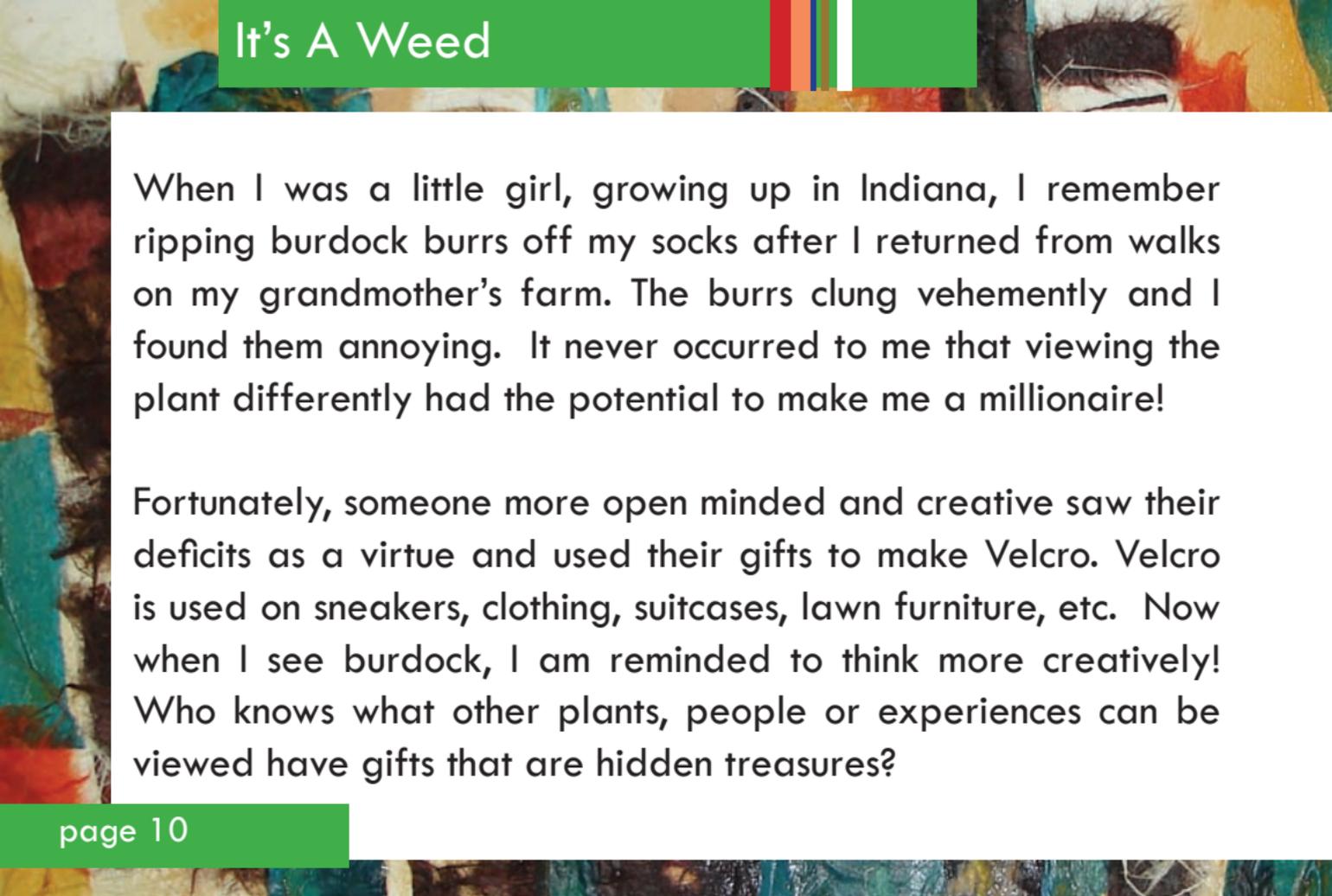
Working with young people in schools and women in the prison system reinforced those lessons. Following my first few sessions with a group of seventh graders, I went into the principal's office to rave about them. "How did you decide who would be in my Life Esteem class?" I asked. "I've never had such a great group of students!"

She literally took two steps back. “They are the worst kids in the school.” I left her office wondering who was more stunned—her or me.

The following week I asked the young people how they were chosen to be in my class. They reinforced the principal’s statement. One girl seemed amused that I didn’t know. She said they let me think the best of them instead of the worst. Treating them with respect and expecting the best had been a winning situation for me as well as the students. There were no limits based on false expectations, and the young people

continued to surprise and delight me with their talents, insights and creative potential.

It was the same in the prison setting. I didn't ask why the women were incarcerated. The less I knew, the better it would be for their learning. Many had been labeled and expected to do poorly all of their lives. The women I met were intelligent, creative, kind and spiritual. Their paths often led them in the wrong direction because of a "go along to get along" attitude. That can be a dangerous path for all of us.



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When I was a little girl, growing up in Indiana, I remember ripping burdock burrs off my socks after I returned from walks on my grandmother's farm. The burrs clung vehemently and I found them annoying. It never occurred to me that viewing the plant differently had the potential to make me a millionaire!

Fortunately, someone more open minded and creative saw their deficits as a virtue and used their gifts to make Velcro. Velcro is used on sneakers, clothing, suitcases, lawn furniture, etc. Now when I see burdock, I am reminded to think more creatively! Who knows what other plants, people or experiences can be viewed have gifts that are hidden treasures?

Weeds can provide an example of looking differently in how we perceive what is valuable.

