

VACATION TO NOWHERE

It is early morning, third day of my vacation to nowhere. I plug in the kettle, scoop bird seed into a tin can, and open the front door. Today, before stepping out into my garden, I pause.

The awakening sun is stretching its rays with fingertips gently resting on the tips of the branches. My bare feet feel the coolness of the night air still on the courtyard pavers. The screech of an impatient Steller's Jay brings my focus to the task at hand.

I launch the seeds from the can, aiming for patches of earth and weeds between the shrubs. It is here the sparrows will hop back and forth, tilling the soil and relieving me of weeding duties.

The jay swoops onto the tabletop, flinging seeds in desperation to reap the black sunflower seeds. The Juncos with their black capped heads are below the tossed seeds raining down on them. They too start to feast.

I hear a familiar buzz pass my ear and I catch sight of the hummingbird. With invisible wings, it flies toward the feeder and stops within two feet. It is clear I am to attend to its feeder on the ledge outside the kitchen window. I lift the feeder; there is still sugary sap. I inspect the yellow plastic flower where the hummingbird feeds more closely. An earwig has crawled inside.

I dump the contents of syrup and remove the lifeless earwig. The hummingbird flits about and if I am to have any peace in the garden, I best clean and refill the feeder. Returning inside, I forgo my tea, pouring the boiled water onto the disassemble feeder, and rinse the glass bottle. Outside the kitchen window, the vigilant ruby red throated hummingbird supervises. I bring the replenished feeder outside and this thimble-sized bird escorts me as I returned it to the ledge. The hummingbird stands on the perch with wings at its side and injects its needle beak into the yellow plastic flower, drinking the fresh sap.

Bird feeding is a normal part of my routine but today was very different. The moment I paused before stepping outside, there was a spontaneous time shift. I had travelled from nowhere to somewhere. I felt unhurried relaxed and present. My busy life disintegrated in the sunlight. My brain whispers "I am on vacation" as though commanding the rest of me to be self-aware. I feel the muscles in my arms and shoulders loosen, and my facial muscles soften to release a smile. My skin senses the transition from the coolness of the early morning to the rising warmth of the day. I hear "I am on vacation, time to enjoy it" in my thoughts.

I rub on sunscreen and dress appropriately for a day out in the tropics: sunglasses, wide-brimmed hat, a book, and tall glass of lemonade garnished with a sprig of fresh mint. The lounge chair is positioned on the patio with a side table to hold the summer necessities. I am ready.

The sky of 2020 is completely blue, void of dissipating white smoke from jetliners. Today, even the clouds have taken leave. There is a moment of quiet as I settle into the wicker seat. The birds have left the garden. A buzz replaces their chirps and fluttering. There on my glass of lemonade, a couple of wasps have arrived. I wave them away and follow with my eyes until they vanish. Soon, they return seeking to share my sweet beverage. Now I know how the hummingbird felt.

I replace my lemonade with a glass of water and a side bowl of water for them. The wasps return, darting in and out taking sips from the bowl. They fly in circles and loops chasing each other. My eyes follow their airshow as they soar straight upward. Once again, they fly out of view but this time I stare in disbelief. I am looking straight into the smiling face of a wasp nest. It hangs from the underside of a tree branch about 20 feet above the ground. The paper shell is about 8 inches in diameter, three small openings look like two eyes and a nose. Below them is a long opening with upturned ends giving it the shape of a smile.

I capture this rare picture as part of my vacation photos in my mind. I glance down at the partial tree trunk placed in the garden a few years ago. Two knots for eyes and one for a mouth. I smile back at the happy log. "That a friend of yours?" I ask.

A sparrow had stopped on the edge of the empty bird bath and now flew away disappointed. I stroll over to the garden shed for the hose and see the inflatable lounge chair my daughter stores here.

I debate. *Why not? Just go ahead be silly. This is vacation time.* I inflate the pool chair, set it beside the lounge, and call a few friends.

"Hey, you're welcome to come over for a pool party, but it is a BYOP-Bring your own pool. I don't have one. I can supply the floating chair and a couple of inflatable dinosaurs." Each know my sense of humour and, in the spirit of fun, reply,

"Sorry, I'll have to pass. I don't have a pool either! I'll see you another time. Have fun".

"I will," I reply.

I attach the garden hose to the tap and fill the bird bath with fresh water, thinking it an improvised pool, at least for the birds. The sparrows fly in for a quick drink and a splash, then go on their merry way. I have lunch poolside, read for a couple of hours, and enjoy a mid-afternoon glass of white wine, all from the comfort of the inflated chair.

Supper time arrives. Nature's airport reopens. The wings of the hummingbird drum on arrival. The juncos and sparrows surely were tweeting their co-ordinates as they landed on the branches of the rhododendrons. Then, the loud jay comes in for a noisy landing on the fence rail. Once again, the birds found the scattered seeds in the garden.

I go into the house and dress for an evening dinner. Solar lanterns and LED rope lighting illuminate the gardens, the midnight sky dotted with starlight. The ocean waves in the distance, compliments of technology and a hidden speaker, roll in on the wind. I set dinner on the patio beside the happy log. I linger until the breeze cools, and the night air signals the day is over.

Vacation to Nowhere was re-routed to my garden. I watched the daily lives of birds and insects, relaxed by the pool and shared drinks with the locals, enjoyed a spectacular airshow, and marvelled at the incredible grand finale: a wasp nest that smiles.. With tourist eyes and vacation mindset, destination Nowhere became a journey of being present and landing in Now Here.