

## BLUEBERRY TRAIL

Fresh out of college, I began my venture into gainful employment as a writer for *The World of Gardening* magazine. My first assignment took me to the Loudersburg Flower and Garden Festival. Boasting of over a hundred vendors plus eateries and exhibits, it occupied over ten acres of ground. Making copious notes and taking hundreds of pictures, I felt confident I could produce a good article on the event.

As the day neared end, I reached the last row of vendors. On that last row, I came across a booth for the 'Blueberry Trail', a small farm specializing in, of course, blueberries. The banner across the top of the tent said they grew over seventy varieties of blueberries. The banner, with its colorful array of blueberries in baskets, held my attention but briefly. Standing behind the table of the booth, an absolutely gorgeous young woman in a blue floral cotton dress and straw hat handed me a brochure.

"I'm sorry," I said. "I apologize for staring. Has anyone ever told you that you have the most beautiful blue eyes?"

“Um ... not in the last hour,” she replied, smiling a beautiful smile. “Would you like to sample some blueberries?”

“Uh ... blueberries?” I managed.

“Yes, blueberries,” she said. “It’s what I grow.”

“Oh, yeah, blueberries ... sure.”

“Grandma’s Delight is particularly sweet,” she said.

“Mmm. That’s about the sweetest blueberry I’ve ever tasted.”

She just smiled.

“Oh, I’m sorry,” I said. “My name’s Josh Williams. I’m a writer for *The World of Gardening* magazine and I’m doing a feature story on the festival today.” Reading the name on the flyer, I asked, “And are you Katie?”

“Yes. Katie O’Donnell.”

“I’m going to have to work in a plug for Grandma’s Delight and the ‘Blueberry Trail’ in my article.”

She just smiled.

By that time, several other people were standing in front of the table, so I said, “I’ll let you attend to your other customers. It was a pleasure meeting you, Katie.”

“And you, Joshua Williams.”

Spending the next day in my motel room organizing my notes and relaxing, I eventually called my boss and convinced him it would be good to stay over on Monday and pay a visit to the ‘Blueberry Trail’. I felt there might be another good story there, and it would be wise to pursue it further. Of course, the thought of seeing the beautiful young woman named Katie O’Donnell again highly influenced my pursuit, but it never hurts to know more about blueberries.

On Monday morning, I stopped at a convenience store on Route 45 to gas up and buy some gum. The store/gas station reminded me of a Norman Rockwell painting, complete with mom and pop behind the counter.

“Excuse me, sir,” I said to the gentleman ringing up my gum. “I’m looking for the ‘Blueberry Trail’ farm. Am I getting close?”

“Yes, sir,” he replied. “Keep heading east and it will be the second driveway on the right, just past the feed store.”

“Okay, great. Uh, thank you.”

“Do you like blueberries, son?”

“Uh ... blueberries? Oh yeah, blueberries. I’m particularly fond of the O’Donnell variety, I mean the Grandma’s Delight variety.”

The old man winked, nodded, and said, “Be careful.”

As I walked out the door, I thought to myself, “Why would he say, ‘Be careful’?”

A sign for ‘Blueberry Trail’ clearly marked the second driveway on the right. The single dirt lane had the classic small farm look, with rows and rows of blueberry plants flanking both sides of the lane. Immaculately mowed strips of what looked like a clover separated the alternating rows of medium size plants and dwarfs. Occasionally, a row of plants trained as small trees would interrupt the pattern. Each row had a small sign at its entrance along the drive that named the variety of blueberry. The driveway ended in a large circle with an ornate fountain gushing with crystal clear water. A wide

grassy border outside the circle appeared to be where visiting cars found their resting place.

When I got out of my car, I noticed a couple walking a meandering trail through blueberries interspersed with abundant flowering annuals. A small sign at the entrance to the trail confirmed what my little gray cells had already deduced—this was Blueberry Trail. I began to follow the trail in isolation, but soon noticed numerous other people ahead of me when a break in the bend of the trail revealed them. The plantings on both sides of the trail had ample signs identifying the species and variety of its residents. As a bonus, so to speak, hand-painted signs with flower and bird borders offered selections of botanical witticisms. The trail had no side paths and no intersections, so no traffic decisions were called for. After a while, I came upon a sign that had an “S” shape on it with an arrow on each end of the snake. A narrow gap split the “S” about halfway through its length. Intrigued by the wordless sign, I had to think about it for a couple of minutes. I believed it conveyed the message that one was at the halfway point of the trail, and it was the same distance whether you turned back or kept ahead. On the back side of the sign, it said ‘halfway point’. I smiled and looked in all

directions, wondering whether someone might be watching and gathering amusement from behind some tall bush.

A short distance away, I could see a petite lady talking to another couple up by a greenhouse. The blue floral dress and straw hat that she wore matched that of my memory from the festival. She had her back to me, though, so I couldn't be totally sure. Finishing the trail, I walked over to the greenhouse where I found her working inside.

Walking up behind her, I said, "How are you today, Katie O'Donnell?"

She turned towards me and replied, "I'm doing just fine. How about you, Joshua Williams?"

I stood speechless. The woman who answered and now faced me was very old and not the beautiful young woman that I met at the festival.

"I know, you've come back for more Grandma's Delight blueberries. Right?"

"I ... uh ... I'm sorry. I thought you were Katie O'Donnell. Uh ... how did you know my name?"

"I am Katie O'Donnell, and I knew your name because I met you at the flower and garden festival. You're a writer, aren't you?"

Frantically searching my brain for some tact-ful way to say, “But you’re not the beautiful young woman from the flower and garden festival”, all I could manage was, “I ... uh ... was heading home, and I thought I’d just drop by and see the ‘Blueberry Trail’ up close.”

“Well, what do you think?” she asked.

“It’s great ... How long have you had the place?”

“I’ve lived here and worked this land for over 40 years.”

“Well ... you’ve certainly done a remarkable job with it. I really like the meandering trail.”

“I’m glad to hear that. It’s a lot of work, but it gives me great pleasure. Sometimes I feel like a young woman again when I’m working with all the plants and beautiful flowers.”

“I can believe that, Katie. Well, look ... I need to be going, but it was really nice to be able to see everything.”

“Thanks for coming, Joshua Williams.”

“Goodbye, Katie.”

“Goodbye.”

When I got back to my car, I just sat there. I suppose it would be reasonable that I should wonder if I'm losing my mind. But if I'm losing my mind, then it wouldn't be reasonable. How could I have possibly mistaken the young, beautiful woman at the festival for the elderly woman at the farm? Suddenly, the words of the man at the convenience store hit me. Is what I've experienced what he meant by 'Be careful'? Could someone question their own sanity just by visiting 'Blueberry Trail'? If the man could issue the warning, then there must have been others before me that have succumbed to whatever exists there.

'Blueberry Trail' looked like a typical small farm being operated by an elderly woman who had lived there most of her life. She had the same beautiful blue eyes that sparkled as the woman at the festival. From the limited knowledge that I had of her, she seemed like a good, kind person. I thought if I visited the farm, I could learn more and craft a story about the beautiful, young woman who owned it. My expectations led to some disappointment, but then maybe my perspective on beauty couldn't face the challenge.

I started the car and backed out onto the driveway. I needed to call my boss and tell him that



there really wasn't a story here after all. I remember one of my journalism professors saying, "You'll know you are on your way to becoming a good journalist when you can smell a good story, even though not everything meets the eye." If there was a good story here, I couldn't smell or see it. Whether that means there truly wasn't a story here or whether I was still a long way from becoming a good journalist, I'm not sure.

Before I started the drive back down the path to the road, I glanced in the rearview mirror and saw the elderly Katie O'Donnell take a drink from the tall, ornate flowing fountain in the middle of the circular driveway. When she walked away from the fountain, she appeared to have an unusual spring in her step—a spring normally seen in someone much younger.