

## No Sticks

Every summer, I go blueberry picking in Tyngsboro, Massachusetts. It is at a lovely farm with lots of things for folks to enjoy – ice cream, freshly made donuts made from blueberries, apples, or strawberries, depending on the season; an animal viewing area with goats, rabbits, and honey bees; and of course an array of fresh produce – picked or pick your own. It is generally hot on picking days and even the tallest bushes in the patch only provide a little shade. But the end justifies the means as few treats bring as much happiness as fresh berries. Tasty and sweet – no one can stop at just one!

I return every summer because I enjoy the blueberry picking and the blueberry eating. Every time I come to pick, I hear the voices of others in the patch. The tall wide bushes obscure those picking but the hidden speakers can be easily heard from near and far. Young children calling out to siblings and parents ‘look at the size of this one’ or ‘Mom, there are a million on this bush!’ Words I undoubtedly shouted to my family many decades ago. Their joy is palpable. Many of the ‘hidden voices’ speak languages I do not. Tyngsboro is between my home, in Nashua, New Hampshire and Lowell, Massachusetts. Each is a gateway city in their respective state with large groups of immigrants from across the world - Asia, Europe, and the Americas. I hear their voices, too. Speaking in Khmer, Mandarin, Hindi, Vietnamese, Spanish, or Russian, and other languages I can’t identify. Even though I don’t speak any of those languages – other than a commonly known phrase or two – it is easy to understand the universal sound of happy families chattering away – saying those same things the young English speaking children are saying (that I said!) but in their own language, their own shared joyfulness. This universality is important for all of us. These lovely families have immigrated to the US for work, to be with family, for freedom and opportunities they don’t have elsewhere. Just as immigrants have come to this country since before this was a country.

A South-east Asian father in the patch was having a wonderfully troublesome time with his young son, perhaps two years old, who was putting anything he could find in the blueberry bucket. The father kept gently asking the boy to only pick ‘blue’ blueberries – Given the father’s heavily accented English and the child’s continued actions, I’m not sure the boy knew what his father meant. The father laughed as leaves and grass and other items found their way into the bucket. When he shouted ‘No sticks!’ I knew the young boy had gone too far. The father kept on laughing, though. He knew the little boy was trying his best.

We hear a lot of negativity toward immigrants these days. Sadly, it has often been thus. Hopefully, we can find a way to embrace the wonder and joyfulness that people bring with them – their culture, traditions, food, and language should be celebrated but we must always remember – No sticks!

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