

Hawaii Trip 2023

It didn't take long to get immersed in the clear blue salty water, soft sand at my feet, along the north shore of the island of Oahu, Hawaii. Even if my brain didn't want to, my body was drawn to the ocean like a wound is drawn to a healer. There was no choice (and I hadn't prepared with a bathing suit either). In the background, majestic peaks covered with greenery fed my eyes and soul with nourishing colours. It's what's left after long gone volcanic activity. Thus began my soulful journey in Hawaii, a deep connection with the land and the thorns of history there.

The first morning we gathered to do some native plant restoration at the YMCA camp where we were staying. In a sea of weeds a few natives were somehow poking through. I was taking it all in- nature responding to imbalance with fast growing weeds, like a bandaid stops the bleeding until the wound can heal. I was slowly noticing those wounds since I arrived. The trauma that occurred at Pearl Harbor. The influx of colonists that uprooted the way the native population had lived. Later I learned that the army rerouted a water source that should be gently caressing (or forcefully etching) the canyon between the volcanic mountains. Thus, no creek meets the sea through the YMCA camp.

And then there is the ocean. And the mountains, and the unstoppable force of nature, so strong there. And the irresistible joy that just flows out by just being there. The sound of my son yelling and screaming unidentifiable sounds as he splashes in the water and the waves toss him hither and tither. He jumps on me and screams joy in my face as he looks me in the eye, and I'm trying to keep my balance as the waves work my thigh muscles.

How do we bring balance to the land? What do we do with a field of weeds in Hawaii? What do we need to *embody* in ourselves to bring balance to our own lands? I am always holding this question in my work as a landscaper. Often when we include nature, recognize the animal and plant beings as equally precious as ourselves, and become inwardly receptive to connecting with nature, that we get anywhere in this regard. The answer is not a mental exercise, but a living experience that evolves naturally moment to moment, like a squirrel responding to a strong wind that blows a limb, or a rabbit running from a fox. Or even a farmer who wakes up and immediately feels drawn to checking on her carrots. There are no prescriptions or rules.

The use of pesticides clearly does harm; but there *could* be a moment when you use it.

And then you see how *that* feels, you see how your body moves (maybe it moves away from it). Maybe that wasn't the best idea, and you keep self correcting. It's also your state of being, and how much you embody love. When we are out of balance we can't tune into nature so well. This is the direction I'm steering my business towards.

We visited a sacred valley called Waimea. A waterfall drops into a pool where people swim, then the water careens along the valley bottom, eventually hitting the ocean. A botanical garden grows along parts of the hills along the valley. This valley is very important to the native Hawaiians. The Waimea valley provides valuable drinking water, as well as medicines. The first day we went there to do some service work- more native restoration by removing the bandaid weeds that nature desperately put down to hold the soil in place (or perhaps we don't really know the reason). The crew leader did a short ceremony for us and sang a native chant. The rain poured harder. The second day we went to visit the waterfall. We took in the many plants on the way there. As we headed back down, I met a native who had a little hut set up with medicinal herbs. She told me the waterfall pool was used medicinally and ceremonially. I asked her if that still happened today.

She gazed at me in a sad, hopeless way. "You see what is going on here now," she said. "But yes, on days that there are no tourists my people come to cleanse in the waters."

What if a boundary was set
Money no longer the root of it
Walk here only with a pure heart
Leaving those without reverence apart

Ways you can include the earth in your landscaping:

1. Treat yourself like a guest, ask for permission to live there (or just visit).
2. Recognize the preciousness of all the different beings, seen and unseen, that share that land.
3. Be receptive to silent messages from the beings of the land and the land itself; even if you don't hear anything, the intention and effort matters.
4. Allow your body to inform you and lead you how to care for the land. Your body knows what it needs and also is in tune with the land. When we get out of the way, it leads us. If you are doing harm to the land, your body will tell you and you will get a feeling, or it will be difficult to do. Learn and self correct.
5. Allow for ease in timing. Don't rush. Often paths reveal themselves when given time. If you are contemplating making a change to the landscape and it feels

forced or stressful, it's not the right time. If it comes from place of peace, calm, and ease, it is.