

# Searching for Wildflowers

An essay by Juliet Fong Zechner

When the news of a novel coronavirus spreading through China first came to light, I was immediately concerned. Perhaps that was my worrisome nature, the fact that I have young children and a husband who is a healthcare provider, or a combination of those things and much more. But even in those moments considering that this virus could result in a world-wide pandemic and thinking about how it would impact our lives here in Dallas, I never imagined a complete shelter-at-home and physically being removed from the UT Southwestern and DFW community in the way that we have been these past months. I truly don't believe anyone could have envisioned the time and place we are in now.

On day one of our shelter-at-home, my kiddos and I ventured out around our usual haunt of White Rock Lake. This has always been our family's place to escape the urban environment of Dallas. Instead of our usual walk on the crowded trails along the lake, we decided to search for wildflowers. We had seen some starting to bloom in the past week and my curious three-year old was intrigued by the different shapes, colors, and sizes. As we cruised around the lake in our Outback, my kids excitedly looked out the windows to search for wildflowers, yelling out whenever even a few fell into their line of vision. We stopped and explored wherever we saw accessible patches, and eventually found a patch of newly bloomed Texas bluebonnets near the east bank of the lake. The look of excitement on my children's faces as we ventured out away from our normal paved trails was a true joy. On that day, they wildly ran through wildflower patches, enjoying their freedom and the wonderful Dallas spring weather. As we finally tore ourselves away and back to the car, my daughter was already asking "Can we come back tomorrow?"; "When can we bring Papa?"

That was the first of what has now become many days away from the routines of what now feels like a past life. As we struggled to find a new rhythm in our lives, we continued to search for wildflowers. Many days that was actual wildflowers, but for most days it was simply searching for a moment of joy and excitement, enjoying our time with our kids, and recognizing all the things we have to be grateful for. For the kids, it's much simpler: homemade popsicles as an afternoon treat, playing in the kiddie pool out back, littering the driveway with chalk creations, riding bikes on the driveway, running through the empty fields at Flag Pole Hill Park, chitter-chattering to family over video chats, and much more flexible screen time allowances. As parents, we struggled to stay productive in our work, keep our kids cared for and [reasonably] well-adjusted, take care of our families and friends, and face each day without dread knowing all the bad that is happening in the world, and what *could* happen to our own community and families. Our wildflowers both aren't and are quite as simple: catching up with old friends, building stronger relationships with neighbors, seeing our community band together to protect one another, having the opportunity to video chat with family just about every day, taking the kids on bike rides and picnics, and enjoying a cold beer in the backyard while the kids play.

With the summer heat, the wildflowers have died and gone dormant. And now that we are months into our 'newer normal', some days it's difficult to still remember all the good in the world, and with all that has gone on in our country, it's sometimes difficult to remember the good in people. On those days, I try to remember the joy my children felt on that first day, running wildly through bluebonnets. I take a deep breath, remind myself of all I have to be grateful for, and look optimistically into the future when the world becomes safe again for school, work, and some of our old routines. We'll continue looking forward to the return of the wildflowers in the spring, and all the promise they bring along with them.