



## My Small Corner of the World

By Tammy Borden ©

It was a perfect fall day in mid-November with a sunny sky and unusually high temperatures approaching 60 degrees. I walked along a road with majestic oaks bordering one side and a glassy lake on the other. It felt like I had the serene world to myself with only an occasional car passing by. As I continued on I came upon an older gentleman with pitch fork in hand standing near a pile of leaves that stretched to the edge of the woods. As I approached more closely I saw smoke rising from the dry leaves. He had set them on fire. Somewhat concerned, I stopped and exchanged pleasantries, then casually asked, "How will you keep it from spreading into the woods?" "I want it to go into the woods," he said. Surprised, I asked why. His response: "Buckthorn."

I had noticed the abundance of this invasive non-native plant and how it covered the entire forest understory. I had walked several miles on the trails of this particular property and it had clearly taken over. It was everywhere.

The gentleman began explaining how he had begun burning the forest edges and portions within the woods last year and had seen a marked improvement already. "It kills the young saplings and destroys some of the seeds and fruit," he said. "Each year we'll do a little more and hopefully one day we'll get it under control. I suppose we'll never get rid of it all, but that won't stop me from trying."

It seemed pretty overwhelming to me. The day I was there it looked like he had only burned a little less than an acre, and it bordered more than 500 acres beyond that. It didn't stop there; I had noticed on my drive to this little retreat that the unwanted undergrowth lined the forest edges for miles around. Appearing to be in his late 50's, I imagined the day of no more buckthorn might not even happen in his lifetime at the rate he was going. Even if he could one day get a handle on his little corner of the world, the bordering landscape would continually press in and encroach on this beautiful place. Yet, as he plaintively leaned against his pitch fork watching the smoldering flames like a mesmerizing campfire, he spoke with a sense of hope and ambition.

I admired him. He faced an impossible mission, yet he wasn't discouraged or defeated. He wasn't going to give up. He was determined to do what he could to impact his little part of the world. I think of the times when I've faced what seemed like an impossibility in my own life and have been tempted to give up. Sometimes, without invitation, the outside world invades mine and I feel overwhelmed to do anything about it. There have been seasons when I've let things get too far out of control to the point of choking out all that's good. And at other times when I'm faced with the needs and injustice in the world, I feel too insignificant to make an impact.

This man's determination reminded me that no matter how overwhelming a circumstance may seem, there's always hope. I suppose I'll never get rid of all the injustice in the world, but that won't stop me from trying. I may not be able to change the whole world, but I can change the small part I call home. And maybe, just maybe... someone may stroll along someday and see me fanning the flames, only to realize they can change theirs too.