



**Times Remembered**  
**Betty A. Young**

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**Blackberries**

Last week while I was push mowing up front along the roadside, I noticed several ripe blackberries in the thicket along the road. When I finished mowing I picked about a cup; the ones I could reach, but it was enough for a blackberry cobbler.

Growing up we picked several gallons of blackberries to freeze and to make jam. Seems like they were larger and more plentiful back then. Picking berries was part of a childhood summer ritual. Whether it was picking in fence rows or in patches; the July sun was blazing hot and it was hard work. You stained your hands and got briars in your fingers, but the taste of the deep purple flesh was a sweet delicacy. Blackberries

were usually plentiful and they were everywhere; if you got there before the birds.

We gathered our picking equipment and set out for our grandparents' farm to pick blackberries. We dressed in long sleeve shirts, long pants and high top shoes to avoid the briars, snakes, chiggers and ticks. Each of us carried a five pound lard bucket as we went off to the berry patch. By noon-time, we usually had our buckets full. The yield varied from year to year, sometimes two gallons and sometimes eight gallons.

Occasionally, we would disturb a black snake leisurely hid among the briars, just wanting to scare the daylight out of me. I usually screamed and took off running. Dad would scold me and tell me they were as afraid of me as I was of them. I want no part of a snake dead or alive. I once heard a story about black snakes wrapping around people squeezing them to death. Also, I've heard stories of how they could take their tails in their mouth and roll down a hill like a hoop.

After we finished picking the berries we headed home. We checked for ticks and chiggers and after a bite of lunch it was

time to "work the berries up," as Mom called it. We would look and wash the berries to make sure there were no "stink" bugs or spiders lurking where they didn't belong. The berries were either frozen or made into jam for delicious jam cakes at Christmas. Mom liked to have about twenty quarts in addition to the jam and jelly. The jam was delicious on hot buttered biscuits.

Mom was always proud of the jars of preserved food we had prepared. She lined the shelves in the basement with canned goods to feed the family for the winter.

I was recently reminded of the effort in picking blackberries the same day I was mowing. Seems all the large, ripe berries were just out of reach and I was standing above a cliff trying to reach them. The vines had sprung up in a thicket of grapevines and oaks, probably planted from seeds carried by the birds.

Unfortunately, it seems that the wild blackberry vines are becoming more scarce or inaccessible. Much of the land once roamed has been developed for housing or commercial use, many roadsides are mowed or sprayed with chemicals.

**The odds of two serial killers in one car must be astronomical**



**America's Heartland**

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I got a hoot out of a joke about an old fellow's conversation with a hitchhiker he had picked up.

After getting settled into the passenger seat, the hitchhiker thanked the man for the ride, then asked, "but how do you know I'm not a serial killer?"

"I'm not worried," the driver replied. "The chances of two serial killers being in the same car have to be astronomical."

Well, I expect it would indeed be highly unlikely for two serial killers to end up in the same vehicle at the

same time. But you realize it's also unlikely for two "good" people to end up in the same car at the same time. That's because the Bible tells us "all have sinned and come short of the glory of God" (Romans 3:23). And that "there is none that doeth good, no, not one" (Psalm 53:3).

That's why mankind, captive to sin, needs a Redeemer. Perhaps one of the best explanations of that truth came from Boston preacher A.J. Gordon who once encountered a little boy carrying a cage with several helpless birds inside. He had trapped them and had plans to feed them to his cat.

The pastor offered the boy \$2 for the cage and the birds. The boy accepted. Pastor Gordon then took the cage to the back of the church property, opened the door and set the captive birds free.

The next Sunday he took the empty cage into the pulpit and used it to illustrate his sermon about Jesus re-

deeming us from the bondage of sin, paying the price for us with His own precious blood.

"That boy told me the birds were not songsters," Gordon told his congregation. "But when I released them, and they winged their way heavenward, it seemed to me they were singing, 'Redeemed, redeemed, redeemed!'"

We owe a huge debt of gratitude to Jesus for what He did for us, dying on that cross as He did. We owe Him our all because, as the Bible says, "you are not your own; you were bought with a price" (1 Corinthians 6:20).

So, if you're ever sitting around, thinking how "good" you are, you might want to remember that no one is good, except Jesus. We may not be serial killers, but we were all captives to sin and were set free by a loving Redeemer.

*Roger Alford offers words of encouragement to residents of America's heartland. Reach him at rogeralford1@gmail.com.*

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