

AN attorney by profession but a gardener at heart, Dad's passion was encouraging things to grow and teaching others about his passion. He saw his gardens and orchards as a way to teach his eight children how to work, and every Saturday and school holiday he was almost giddy at the chance to have us at his disposal.

Year after year—despite our protests that we already knew—Dad gathered us around the kitchen table, pulled out a marker and yellow legal pad, and drew a tree with branches growing in various directions. He then reviewed in great detail the principles of apical dominance. He showed us where branches should be removed altogether, and where others should simply be cut back so they would grow in the right direction, leaving the center of the tree open to sunlight.

He taught us that when a fruit tree is pruned early and regularly to grow correctly, then thinned in the early spring, the result is larger, sweeter fruit.

After reviewing all this on paper, we headed up to the orchard, where he oversaw our pruning of his beloved fruit trees—dozens and dozens of them. Despite the long hours, I enjoyed this time pruning with Dad. He was relaxed and happy when we all worked in the orchard, far removed from the stress of his office work. We had some of our best talks and jokes with Dad—loppers and shears in hand—among the trees at the top of that hill.

Dad taught me about pruning more than just fruit trees. In careful, gentle ways, he helped prune and shape me, just as he did his trees. When I was a teenager, he sought opportunities in the garden or orchard to talk with me one on one. After dinner, he might say, "Come up the hill with me and let's pick the ripe watermelons," or, "I need your help to change the water in the orchard."

While we walked and worked, he talked to me about characteristics in

people that were important, that made them easier to work with or live with. And then he would gently mention a recent situation in our home, or something I was struggling with. He would talk about how that issue was sometimes hard for him, too, and would suggest ways we might both make a change.

One of the things I remember most is his effort to help me overcome my intense shyness. I was much more comfortable in the barn, with sheep, dogs, and a pony, than I was talking to my peers. Sitting out on the deck with Dad after dinner one night, he told me about a book that had helped him when he was young and very shy. He said he'd pay me a quarter for every chapter I read—and for a girl earning money to buy her first goat, that was plenty motivation.

I read that book three times as a girl just starting junior high. My dad and I would talk about the principles in the book as we worked together in the

garden or the orchard, or just sitting alone on the back deck. He knew that if I could overcome my shyness and learn to focus on the people around me, on making them feel comfortable and being genuinely interested in them, it would benefit me all my life, in every relationship.

While his counsel was helpful, I felt at the time that it was sometimes restrictive and difficult to follow. That changed one day when I was a senior in high school, during a conversation with a good friend. I envied this friend a bit because her parents allowed her to stay out late after football games, while I had to be home earlier. She said to me, "I wish my parents cared what I did and when I was home like yours do. They must really love you."

That was one of the first times I saw Dad's pruning in my life for what it truly was—a sign that he cared. I see now that Dad's guidance helped me prune back while I was young



FRUITS OF pruning

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tendencies and habits that would have made my future life and relationships more difficult. His pruning has allowed me to experience greater happiness.

This spring, a neighbor asked me to prune her fruit trees. Entering the yard, I was surprised and sad-

dened to see the number of problems these trees had because they'd been left to grow with no pruning or shaping during their first three years. Because they'd grown unchecked, it was very difficult to prune them properly.

As I worked, in my mind I thanked Dad again for the pruning lessons. When branches are guided in the right direction early on, easy, regular pruning is all that is needed to maintain the desired shape. Dad's example has provided a model for how I regularly

evaluate and prune my own behavior as a parent, as well as help my four children prune habits and behavior in ways that will allow sweeter fruit to grow in their lives.

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