The Plant Doctor's LANDSCAPE TIPS

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LETTERS FROM MOM

Photo 1: My Mom graduated from college in 1938, not a common occurrence in those days for women. Perhaps I am biased, but I thought she was sufficiently beautiful to be a movie star back then.

Photo 2: Growing up on a farm can be an exhilarating and interesting experience. Today, I occasionally ride a Harley Davidson (=Hog) motorcycle for pleasure and relaxation. When I tell my fellow HD riders that I started riding Hogs at age 4 or 5, they are highly skeptical.

INTRODUCTION

As we approach the Holidays at the end of 2018, I decided not to write a scientific article about tree and landscape issues. Instead, as I often do at this time of year, I elected to present a personal rendition of my experiences growing up. This article is devoted to my Mother.

Like my Dad, my Mom, Ruth Elizabeth Warren, grew up in the Great Depression on a self-sufficient family farm . . . which meant pigs for bacon and pork chops, beef cattle for steaks and hamburger, chicken for eggs and meat, dairy cows for milk, butter and cheese, geese for down, tapping maple trees for syrup, etc. Those upbringings would have profound effects upon my development and maturation as well. My Grandpa, Lee Warren, believed his children should have the best chance of success in life, the reason all of his children were urged to attend college. Even though my Mom was his only daughter, he apparently believed women should have the same opportunity as men of the period. Hence, my Mom graduated from college in 1938 (Photo 1), not a common occurrence for women in those days. As it would turn out, I would follow somewhat in my Mom's footsteps: raised on a farm (Photo 2) followed by attendance and graduation from college. Education begets education.

Photo 3: I worked on our family farm until going to college. At Mom and Dad's urging, I began saving money for my college education at a young age. One of the money saving activities was raising and showing steers at the county fair as part of a 4H project.

In preparation for college, I saved money by raising and showing steers at the local county fair (Photo 3).

With her father's guidance and urging towards advanced education, Mom became a fairly independent, self-assured individual (Photo 4) . . . yet she still believed very strongly in her family and religious values. Following are some stories that I think many of you might find interesting. They are all true.

BURNT STEAK AND BOILED POTATOES

After Mom graduated from college, she had a career as a teacher. In those days, women who had careers outside the home were still expected to cook, clean house, do the laundry, raise the children, etc. So, because she would come home after a grueling day of teaching, she would do the simplest thing possible to prepare the evening meal, which down on the farm was always called supper (not dinner, which was at noon). She would throw several steaks into a hot oven and boil some potatoes. The steaks always came out burnt and the potatoes mushy. When I told my friends at school that we had steak for supper every night, they were very impressed. But, I said, "the steaks always come out burnt." They were still impressed. My Dad would always pitch in to do the dishes after supper. And when we kids got old enough to reach over

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Photo 4: This photo from 1940 possibly shows to my Mom's attributes to their greatest advantage: independence, self-assurance and liberation from societies expectations.

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the sink, cleaning dishes became our job. My Mother always complained that my brother, Jim (Photo 5), never got the dishes clean enough, while I always cleaned them to perfection. Soon, my brother didn't have to do dishes anymore. Looking back, I now know who was the smartest of the two brothers still living at home.

GRANDPA'S "ICE CREAM"

When I was still very young, my Grandpa Lee (Mom's Dad) came to live with us. He was in his mid to late 80's, and it was the first time I had encountered symptoms of dementia associated with the elderly. I can remember on quite a few occasions when, after a few nibbles, Grandpa would shove aside the burnt steak and mashed potatoes (a variation on the boiled potatoes theme) and tell my Mom he wanted his ice cream. She would always tell him "not until you finish your supper." After a brief standoff, it seemed that Mom always relented, because Grandpa did not want to miss his favorite TV program – Big Time Wrestling, where The Sheik and The Hillbillies were his favorite . . . for those of you who are old enough to remember. So, she'd go to the freezer, take out a carton of ice cream, and pretend to scoop some into a bowl. What she was really doing was surreptitiously scraping his mashed potatoes into a bowl. Then, she would bring the bowl over to Grandpa at the kitchen table and tell him, "here's your ice cream, Dad." He would savor every loving spoon full of that "ice cream" until it was all gone. Sitting across the kitchen table from Grandpa, I would always chuckle . . . vowing never to let my Mom engage in such skullduggery with me.

Photo 5: Mom named her three sons after prominent Biblical characters: Phillip (the oldest), James (Jim, middle) and David (Davey). We lost Jim to cancer in 1991; it was very hard on all of us but especially on Mom and Dad who expected to pass before their children do.

Wilted Greens: When I was young, our farm was still somewhat self-sufficient; eventually that would change as farmers became more specialized. We always had a big garden, where we would grow fresh vegetables for consumption throughout the summer and fall, and for canning food for the winter months. However, in addition to the large garden, Mom and Dad had also learned to live off the land. For example, she would go out into the lawn and dig up plants that we would normally call weeds today. One such plant, which I suspect must surely be almost extinct by now due to extensive herbicide usage, was back then called the dandelion. She would "wilt" these "greens" in a cast iron skillet with bacon fat, sugar, and vinegar as a dressing. The first time I tasted it I thought "My gosh, this is awful". I looked at my Mom and she would say the greens were full of "veeetamins." I'd look over at my Dad and he would simply say, 'Eat r down" – this phrase became quite popular in our family decades before that well-known comedian said, "Git r done". Those were the days when you ate what was put in front of you or you didn't eat at all. In addition to the burnt steak and boiled potatoes, the wilted greens represented another reason why I was so skinny when growing up. However, when I was older and came home from college, I often requested those "wilted greens" because I would eventually acquire a taste for them. To this day, I occasionally wilt some greens in a cast iron skillet with that sugar, vinegar and bacon fat dressing . . . in honor of Mom. I think it could be said that my Mom had succeeded in a bit of skullduggery with me after all.

Chicken Fingers for Supper?: One afternoon, Mom was getting very impatient. She had planned chicken for supper that evening, but Dad had not yet come home to kill the chicken. Because she had seen Dad perform the ritual dozens of times, she decided she would do the preparation. Let's see, simply catch a chicken, lay its neck upon a wooden fence post and hack its head off. Then, you'd watch it flop around awhile like a "chicken with its head cut off". I was still very small, maybe five or six years old at the time. We finally cornered and caught a chicken and she laid its head on the wooden fence post. As she raised the hatchet, I turned away not wanting to see the chicken killed. I heard a "Whop!!", followed immediately by a SHRIEK, which didn't seem to be a noise that a chicken could make. As I turned towards Mom, I saw that she had completely missed the chicken but had succeeded in cutting off half of her index finger. Actually, half of her finger was still hanging by some skin. She ran into the house and wrapped her finger and hand in a rag. Then she scooped me up, placed me in our car and drove herself to the hospital 12 miles away. The doctors sewed her finger back on, and even though she never had much use out of that finger anymore, she still had a finger. Did I tell you that my Mom was a tough gal?? Did you ever wonder where the term "chicken fingers" originated? Now you know.

PALM SUNDAY 1965

This date lives in infamy in my family. I was 12 years old at the time and had a big day at church leading up to Easter Sunday. We had gone to bed after watching TV, which as I remember included the Ed Sullivan Show. Sometime after falling asleep, I was abruptly awakened by my Dad's loud voice – "Wake up . . . Davey, Jim . . . hey, wake up!" Unbeknownst to me a short time before, a tornado had directly struck our farm. My Dad and Mom were sleeping on the first floor while my brother and I were sleeping on the second. When my brother and I didn't initially respond to my Dad, my Dad looked up the winding staircase to the second floor and saw a clear, starry sky; he thought we had literally been swept away. Believe it or not, my brother and I had slept through that terrible storm (Photos 6, 7 & 8), even with the roof being ripped off the attic floor over our heads! This tragic event reminded me of Dorothy and Toto in the The Wizzard of Oz, although our experience was real life and not a movie.

My Dad had been awakened by the noise of what he described as "a cyclone had gone through." The electric clocks had

stopped at 11:14 that night. We had to walk about a mile away to our neighbors, stepping over downed telephone poles, electric wires and dead farm animals. Except for our large barn and portions of our house, we lost all of our outbuildings and their contents (Photo 8). Those contents included pigs, cattle, chicken, geese, etc. Several people in our community were killed that night as that tornado tore across the countryside leveling modern construction homes. Many people attributed our survival to the heavy log construction of our home (Photo 7). However, up until her dying day, Mom always thanked the Lord for our deliverance from the clutches of death during that night of horror.

1969 AMC AMBASSADOR, AHEAD OF HER TIME

In 1960, my parents bought a new Rambler Rebel; all of us boys learned to drive on that car. When I eventually drove that old Rambler to high school, everyone made fun of it. You see, their parents had given my classmates Mustangs, Camaros and Chevelles. I reminded my friends that while it may not be the fastest car around, it got way better fuel economy. Besides, I added, the Rambler was the only car in which the front seats would lay down to form a bed. Even though I sometimes bragged about the Rambler's bed, I never seemed to be able to partake of that option. Anyway, I became very protective of that Rambler and the AMC brand because I felt fortunate to be able to have any car to drive. All the boys learned to drive on that ole Rambler and took it through high school . . . even though my older brother and I were separated by 10 years. Because we eventually needed a second car, my parents, partly at my urging, went to the local AMC dealer again. They bought a brand new 1969 Ambassador. The car was huge, had a big V-8, and air-conditioning as standard equipment. Compared to what we had previously, that Ambassador represented Luxury, with a big "L." Now, a couple stories about Mom and that Ambassador:

Mom's Power Shifting: The men always drove if there was a male in the car. Why? Well, I suppose that we guys thought we were better drivers or something . . . I don't know. Anyway, my Dad and I had taken a combine and a tractor over to another farm about 6 miles away. When my Mom arrived to pick us up, we simply jumped into the car to let Mom chauffer us back home. She dropped the automatic gearshift level down into "L" (Low), took off while revving the engine up and gaining speed, moved the shift lever into "D2," revving her up again while gaining speed, and finally shifted into "D" (Drive). At almost the same time, my Dad and I asked her what she was doing. She replied that she was shifting the transmission just like she had learned back in the 1930s when she learned to drive a Plymouth Coup with a "three on the tree". Apparently, because the gear levers for the "automatic" 69 Ambassador and "manual shift" '39 Coup were to the right of the steering wheel, my Mom apparently believed she had to shift this automatic transmission car as well. Today, many of the high-performance cars have high tech automatic transmissions that can be shifted manually if the driver feels compelled to pretend she/he is a race car driver. My Mom was simply ahead of her time by several decades when she power-shifted that Ambassador's automatic transmission!!

Unintended Acceleration: One day, my Mom was on her way to visit some "Shut-Ins," and as she was turning into their drive she accidently depressed the accelerator to the floor rather than step on the brake. She threw that big Ambassador sideways into a huge oak tree. My Dad was not happy. In later years, we concluded that Mom had simply experienced "unintended acceleration" at least two decades before the Audi 5000 made that term a household name. Didn't I tell you she was ahead of her time!?!?

I had many fond memories of that Ambassador, including taking my dates and friends in it to two high school proms. About ten years ago, a 1969 Ambassador three seat wagon became available from

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Photo 6: The Palm Sunday 1965 tornado destroyed our home. My brother Jim and I were sleeping upstairs on the second floor when the attic roof flew off (we slept through it). My dad drove the school bus (the same as in Photo 2) to supplement his farm income as well as to provide for health benefits for the family. The cyclone rolled the school bus 200 feet and stuck a telephone pole up through it.

Photo 7: My Uncle Edgar poses for another newspaper photo of our house. Most modern construction homes that took a direct hit as ours did were leveled. Many people believed our home's heavy log construction saved us. In fact, no one in my family was physically injured. The log construction can barely be distinguished where shingles have been torn off by the storm.

Photo 8: An aerial view of our farm before the Palm Sunday 1965 cyclone struck. All the smaller outbuildings and their contents (livestock, farm equipment, etc.) that are visible in this photo disappeared during night of the storm. My Mom always attributed our salvation to God.

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a fellow AMC club member. So, in memory of my Mom and Dad, I purchased it. My Dad was still alive at the time and loved it. I now use the '69 to tow my 1972 Gremlin to car shows (Photo 9). I had ordered that Gremlin new from the factory in the fall of 1971.

Letters from Mom: My Mother always found time to write to me no matter where I was . . . at Ohio State University or later in Michigan. Although my Dad never wrote letters to anyone else in his entire life, he always tacked on a page or two of his ramblings to Mom's letters. Even though I rarely returned letters to them, they never, ever stopped writing to me. However, I visited them often, and they visited me in Michigan whenever they could. When we kids were very young, as part of Mom's charitable efforts in the community (see The Shut-Ins, below), Mom developed her own "Gazette" . . . actually a newsletter of sorts. I can recall that when she had her newsletter sketched out, she would take it to our church and "mimeograph" copies so she could send her newsletter out to people in the community. When those papers came out of the mimeograph machine, they were still slightly wet and exhibited an interesting chemical odor, which would probably be considered a nasty cancer-causing toxin today. But I loved to smell that chemical just as we thought Elmer's Glue had an interesting odor back then. In her newsletter she would write about people in the community, people who needed our prayers to get over an illness or the loss of a loved one. And, she would write a few lines about some scripture from the Bible and about our need to be good Christians. Of considerable embarrassment, however, she wrote extensively about her sons and all of their successes. Whenever I encountered a recipient of Mom's newsletter, I usually had to remind them that Mom tended to exaggerate just a little about her family.

The Shut-Ins: Mom coined the phrase, "Shut-Ins," for the elderly, the infirmed, the handicapped, the downtrodden and people who just couldn't get around much anymore. In addition to sending them her newsletter, she would also frequently stop by to visit them. And on many occasions, she would deliver her home-cooked dinners long before there was a Meals on Wheels or Hungry Man TV dinners. As a youngster, I can remember Mom operated a "Henry Ford-style" assembly line of homemade "TV dinners" in her kitchen. These homemade dinners usually consisted of ham or turkey, dressing, mashed potatoes and gravy, pie, etc. As a youngster, my job was typically to drop a large dollop of mashed potatoes or gravy onto the plates. She would deliver these dinners to the Shut-Ins . . . who relished those meals and looked forward to the next delivery. In contrast to the "Burnt Steak and Boiled Potatoes" fast food suppers, Mom was actually an excellent cook when she had the time. During her visits to the Shut-Ins, she would relate the news about the community, who was ill and needed our prayers, who was getting married, who was having a baby, who was getting divorced – what a shame(!), and perhaps a little gossip now and then. Whether the Shut-In was religious or not, perhaps as a condition to my Mom's visit and delivery of her now famous "TV dinners," they had to listen to a short sermon, usually delivered in the form of a prayer. It might go something like, *"Dear Jesus, please help Edna to heal from her fractured hip after she fell three weeks ago. She's been lonely since Lowell passed away two years ago from a heart attack. As you know, Edna devoted her life to teaching Spanish and French in high school. She's made the world a better place and her community still needs her now . . . Let's also pray for the Millers, who lost their home to a fire last Tuesday. The community is collecting clothing and food to help sustain them while they find a new home. But we still need your gracious assistance . . . I want to also pray for Art Bishop; the rumors about his wandering eye is putting all of us at discomfort. Linda is a wonderful wife and companion and needs our support . . . Please bless Davey Lee after his discovery of that new tree bore and help him to continue on to even greater success . . . In Jesus name, we pray."*

Photo 9: Partly in memory of my family's history, I eventually purchased a 1969 AMC Ambassador similar to the one we owned . . . this one is a three-seat wagon. I use the Ambassador to tow my 1972 Gremlin, which I ordered new from the factory in the fall of 1971. Because of the rarity of both vehicles, this assemblage is quite a site for car aficionados as it comes down the road.

Several weeks ago, a friend told me she wanted to play a country song for me because it reminded her of me. I'm not much of a country fan, but as the melody started and Tim McGraw began to sing "Always be Humble and Kind," my eyes started to well up with tears. I was truly humbled by my friend's tribute to me. As this song continued to play, I realized it really represented Mom. I also realized that the person I had become was largely due to my upbringing and love from my parents. My Mom instilled in me various values including independence and freedom of thought, just as her father did for her, while never forgetting the values that make this world such a wonderful place.

In this time of great divisiveness in our country, we should all remember the intentions of our Founding Fathers and sacrifices made by previous generations. We should never forget the really important things in life and what has brought us all together as Americans. While Mom was totally devoted to her family, she felt a great obligation to everyone in the community regardless of their political or religious leanings. Her home-cooked TV dinners, newsletters and Shut-In visits were her attempts at ensuring no one was forgotten . . . and they weren't. If there is a Heaven, I know that Mom and Dad are there looking down on me . . . and you. Now that Mom has the ear of her Lord, we need to decide if we're gonna be naughty or nice. Happy Holidays.

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