

# Sanity insurance

*For me, trees, bushes, and plants are living history—my connection to my childhood, my parents and family, my rural Brethren heritage. Growing things is my sanity insurance.*

by Lauree Hersch Meyer

"Why plant all these trees and bushes, Mom? They probably won't even bear before this place is leveled for another office building!"

Joel, my 13-year-old, would rather read, play soccer, work at the computer, or possibly even clean his room than work in the garden. He *does* like to see things grow and bloom. How can I answer his question so it makes sense to him?

It's all so clear to me. These aren't trees and bushes; they're living history. They're my connection to my childhood, my parents and family, my rural Brethren heritage. Growing things is my sanity insurance.

Some play golf, swim, or run. I plant, prune, dormant-oil, mulch, harvest. With my hands in the soil, I feel the rhythms of seasons and weather. As trees and plants are affected, I am connected to the rhythms of earth and sun, wind and rain.

I don't want to garden or farm professionally. I've always wanted to be vocationally involved with church people: questioning, listening, probing, imagining, hoping, acting. Yet I've left a trail of gardens in Germany, Kankakee, Taiwan, Charlotte, and now Lombard—wherever I've lived for at least a year.

How can I let my suburban-reared son feel a living connection to the earth, soil, seasons? His was a very *reasonable* question. The answer in me touches my emotive heritage. Logically, he is right; my planting is not cost- or energy-efficient. But then, who nurtures life meanings on the basis of efficiency? Sabbath points us to re-creation, not to the logic of productive return. Our world knows that. Recreation is a bulging industry, dimly reflecting an awareness of re-creation that our age of productivity

has nearly forgotten.

Back to Joel's question. I can only confess to him the significance of this activity for me. "It's who I am, son. I grew up on a farm. Planting is as deeply rooted in me as are our trees in the soil. They need deep roots to be healthy; so do I."

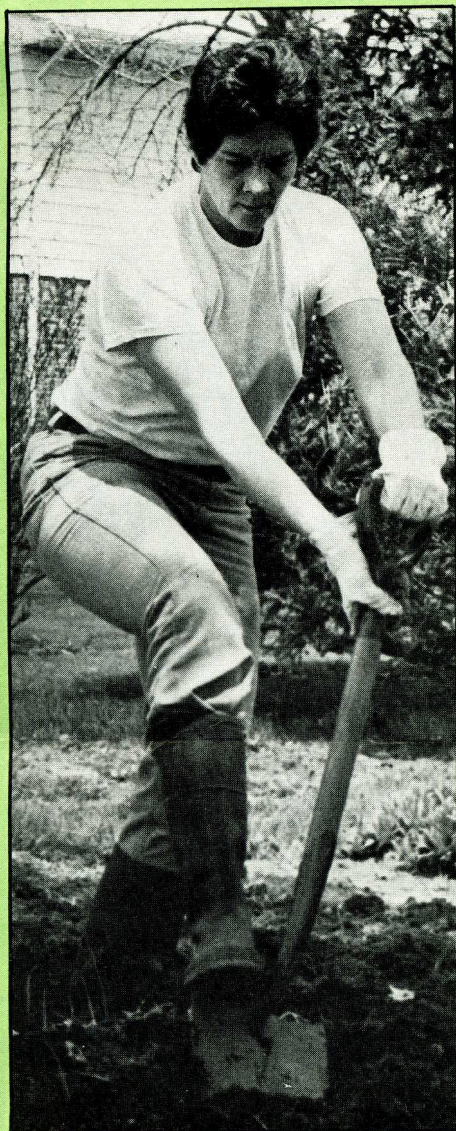
What will he do with my response? "Obviously," he answered, half grinning, half shrugging, and letting me continue to wonder.

I didn't enlighten Joel. I taught him no new facts. My confession was no surprise to him. Our house overflows with growing plants, some of which are usually in bloom. In February, we begin growing seeds in styrofoam cups salvaged from the York Center church's coffee-hour trash bins. By late March, the young cabbage plants are outdoors under cut-off milk cartons and surrounded by heavy mulch. The boys set them out this year; I was indoors with flu. Earlier we had pulled debris from the flowers and pruned grapes.

When they're adult, will Joel and Jonathan be connected with the soil? They'll remember Granny and Granddaddy Hersch and the Virginia farm. But, except for haying, the farm was all vacation. They've not been subject to the seasons' harsh domination and ecstatic glory.

But seasons were my childhood playmates. Will seasons and weather be personally valuable to my boys? Or will they, like television announcers, assess weather only in terms of its significance for fuel bills, lawnmowing, or golfing?

Although no longer rural by vocation or geography, I remain vitally involved with soil, sun, drought, flood, freeze. Many family activities are organized about the yard and garden. I cherish the pulses of rural soil and weather as well



*Lauree Hersch Meyer grew up on a Manassas, Va., dairy farm. Living and teaching on the suburban campus of Bethany Seminary, she works at keeping herself and her two sons, Joel and Jonathan (left and right, opposite page), attuned to the soil and the seasons.*





as urban neighborhood and business.

As I trot across my back lawn—crossing no street to reach the seminary—I notice that a (characteristically) late Chicago spring is swelling cherry, apricot, and plum tree buds. The peach and nectarine trees appear to have winter-killed. Some grape vines suffered or died. (Why do I in-

sist on trying to grow southern varieties so far north?) The cauliflower and broccoli are crowding their milk-carton hotcaps. The rabbits have turned from gnawing the bark of unprotected young trees to nibbling the first pea shoots.

Life connections and sanity insurance come in strange ways, Joel. I hope you

also will be attuned to earth's majestic and capricious seasons, whatever your vocation. It is a wonderful (albeit addictive) heritage for rural, suburban, or urban life. □

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