

7-13-12 Soft Rain

This year's July fourth brought some much needed rain. As I watched with anticipation, I couldn't help but be satisfied with the gentle rain we received. Others may have wanted the rain to hold off for parades and cookouts but I was grateful for the type of rain that fell.

This year's Fourth of July rain was something to celebrate because it was, as my father used to say "soft rain". He loved a soft rain because he loved to fish and the gentle rain would allow the worms to surface alive and still be used for bait. A heavy rain drowned them. That's a sad sight.

The other reason my father loved a gentle rain is because he loved his lawn. He had the best lawn in our little South Weymouth neighborhood. As kids on a boring summer day, riding our bikes around the neighborhood, looking for something to do and/or talk about, I once suggested that we choose the nicest looking yard. My friends quickly announced this was not fair because I knew very well that my yard would win that contest. So, okay, maybe they were right. I gave it a try on a boring day!

The reason that my father had the best lawn is the same reason why he loved a soft rain. When we received just a drizzle, he would look out the window with great satisfaction, announcing, "This will be great for weeding!" Shortly thereafter he could be found in his glory, in khakis and tee shirt, on his hands and knees, crawling around pulling out crabgrass and other unwanted arrivals. They pulled out easily because the earth was moist and soft at this point. He was a happy man on the day of a soft rain.

If my father was caught up on his weeding or, for some other reason, (after all, he had eight children and was a full time professional pilot, carpenter, mechanic and inventor!) he did was not able to get out there in the rain, he still enjoyed watching it and appreciating it through the window. He might declare, "This is great! This is so needed! This soft rain will sink down into the earth. A heavy rain just creates a lot of run-off and flows into the catch basins. This rain is just right!"

My father's commentary on rain comes back to me now as an adult with him long gone (too long!) and I still learn from him. The Town of Halifax has begun a watershed association in response to the terrible problem of algae being responsible for closing beaches for most of the summer for the West Monponsett Pond. It is a widespread problem. It is a national problem. The algae requires nutrients and receives them from many sources, including agriculture, lawn fertilizers, failed septic systems sitting in the ground water and road run-off.

My father did not fertilize his lawn. That was not the thinking of the day. Compost maybe; manure, yes. My father did not apply herbicides either. It just wasn't the go-to solution of the time. His was truly the DIY generation and he and my mother did! Weeds were eradicated by pulling; not by the application of poison.

I thought of my father recently during July Fourth's soft rain. I went out to weed, just as my father had done so many decades before me. As I did, I began to experience other reasons why he loved a gentle rain and the activity of weeding. As I crawled around, I realized what a meditative and contemplative experience weeding can be. There were decisions to be made. Too much of this; too little of that. This is in the wrong place; better placed over there.

As I peeked under the low draping branches of a dwarf red maple, I discovered a seedling! Ah, a gift! I felt the wonder of a child and realized this is why most of the world's cave art was discovered by children.

Then there were the metaphors galore! Did I get the whole root? Did I nip it in the bud? If uncertain, should I wait until "wheat and chaff" are evident? Thinking of the Bible while weeding is not a bad thing. These were truly enjoyable and relaxing questions to consider, outside of my personal sphere of problems and dilemmas and, thus, they took me away from those conflicts and did so better than any Calgon bath might!

They say the Bible was written by fishermen; maybe they did some weeding as well, to arrive at those universal insights! If we treat the earth as we want to be treated ourselves, with kindness and tenderness, we will be like that soft rain; sinking in, being effective and doing no harm along the way.

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