

An Unexpected Lesson

BY JONN KARSSEBOOM

I've discovered that it's possible to learn something new in the garden even when I'm not listening. With an ironic twist of the natural laws of the universe, this learning occurred, get this, while I was busy talking.

The poor kids, they even had to listen to me.

It was a busy and rainy Thursday afternoon. We had triple booked a small group of "Nature Study" students from Horizon Christian School as well as an interview with a columnist from a garden magazine (Who wanted more information on what is the definition of our "Rebel Gardener".) And while that was happening, we had to be at Byrom Elementary School to help create Ms. Ramey's fifth grade auction project.

"A Rebel Gardener" I explained to the visiting garden writer while he was helping me load moss into a truck for the class "is a gardener who gardens despite all the odds against them."

He quickly jotted that down as the rain dripped onto his notepad. As I hurried to get things ready he hurried to get his story. I knew the Horizon class was in good hands with KT back and Sting coming on. I just needed to get enough materials in my truck to be able to create a garden "project" that could sell at the upcoming auction and, against all odds, just maybe impress enough fifth graders to learn a few easy tricks about gardening.

I could see why it might take a village to raise a child.

When I arrived at the school I quickly began to set the stage. It had to be outside. -That much I knew. Water, soil, and moss aren't good ingredients for the inside. Not finding any overhead cover and quickly running out of time I opted for the best place available- literally outside and just outside of Ms. Ramey's classroom.

When the first group of potential gardeners came, fresh from the warm indoors, the rain became serious. It was the "big drops" kind of rain -the kind of rain where each drop is able to penetrate a full head of hair and still have enough mass and velocity to begin to trickle down a neck.

To make matters even better, our exercise in gardening was taking handfuls of Oregon sphagnum moss, washing it in tubs of water and stuffing it tightly into a hanging basket. (Truth alert: It was actually a sphere.)

I described the job to the class as one that required both hands to get wet and dirty.

As I began to elucidate on the history of moss in Oregon and how it was harvested and it's physical properties to hold moisture and nutrients I grew worried. I was completely protected in my professional Gore-Tex rain gear and hat but as seconds turned to minutes I saw Ms. Ramey's fifth graders become soaked.

They however, just nodded and went at it.

"Oh! This feels awesome!" Moira squealed. It feels kind of like warm worms." I had filled the tubs with warm water for fun.

"I could take a bath in this." And with that recommendation, all hesitation left the group.

They came and went and jostled for a chance to grab moss and stuff it in the globe. Wet t-shirts stuck tightly to skin and shoes became wonderfully squishy.



Head tilted to the raining sky, arms outstretched with each hand holding clumps of wet moss Tommy yelled "I love to garden!" I thought it was funny that unlike grownups I never heard a word of concern for the weather.

Done with my teaching, I watched and let them finish their project for the day. As I packed everything into the truck and drove away I thought long and hard about the class. Had they learned anything about gardening? I could only hope so.

But as I thought awhile I realized they had given me perhaps a good lesson. While I was teaching gardening they taught me about being fully present. During the last hour of my day in the nursery the rain still came. I removed my hood and jacket and just let the rain, well, rain.

It never felt better.



Jonn Karsseboom tends to be an early riser, fast walker and curiously prefers dark chocolate. Email your philosophies on life to jonn@thegardencorner.com.