

Finding a New Hat

BY JONN KARSSEBOOM

I ran into an old friend, actually the mother of an old friend, the other day when I was busy paying for a hat to cover my new long hair. It was a windy day, and I was just learning about using too little pomade so my hair was like a tall tuft of blowing, swaying autumn grass.

Because of that and because I was out of my element inside of a clothing store, I was embarrassed as she walked past. But we go way back to my junior high school days and since I hadn't seen my friend for some time, I couldn't just let her innocently pass by.

"Mrs. T!" I called out.

I could tell from her expression that she wasn't expecting me.

Her real name was Sandy but we called her "Mrs. T" because it was the happy middle point for her. The "Mrs." was out of well-earned respect (she was a working mom) but we couldn't quite bring ourselves to use her complete last name. Her friendliness, her easy laugh and openness made her one of us.

She also knew everyone involved with her two sons (her first son Gregg was my friend) and it wasn't the least bit unusual to have someone over to their house everyday.

Hers was also the first home I remember where her garden reflected very much her personality. Wonderfully manicured, it represented much of her Japanese heritage with elegantly shaped maples mixed with sturdy pruned pines. It was a semi-perfect combination of managed formality mixed with an All-American green lawn. (Her husband's project.)

In a strange way my friend Gregg reflected the mix I saw in the garden as

well. He inherited height and a striking muscular physique from his football-playing collegiate father but his sharp sense of humor, outgoing (and popular) personality and dark skinned natural good looks all came from his mom.

Mrs. T and I didn't even wait to get out of the way of the cashier's business before catching up. All was well in her garden from what I could gather from her, her real problem was that the interior of her home was aging which involved leaking toilets and sinks and remodels.

And she laughed about those issues because she knew how little they all were.

My good friend Gregg came up in conversation of course. It's been five years since I had the chance to last see him. Mrs. T and I talked about him, how the last time we knew, he abhorred Facebook even though she created a page for him. If he knew about that, we were sure he'd roll his eyes on the complete waste of time it is. It was a good easy laugh with her, about him and in a strange way, with him.

Gregg I suspect didn't become much of a gardener. He traveled; he developed a complete network of friends and business associates in Santa Barbara. He worked on difficult computer-generated scenes of famous films.

In fact, he hadn't had much time in his busy short life to create a garden because he passed away when he turned 45.

Yet, as we talked and reminisced about him I marveled at Mrs. T's amazing strength. There wasn't any need to shy away from

death and passing. We didn't talk in hushed tones or carefully worded sentences. It was as clear and certain and real as the falling leaves in autumn.

Of course there was a bit of sadness in us both but thanks to Mrs. T, it came in equal measure of humor and delight. It was like the mix of sun and rain in the garden.

As we said our goodbyes I watched Mrs.

T continue on her way. It was uplifting to talk of Gregg and our adventures together. I was glad for that. And with those wonderful memories, I put my new hat on, stuffed my long hair in and set my sights on next season's garden.



Jonn Karsseboom enjoys observing life in Tualatin as well as the ever-changing seasons. Email him with your observations at www.thegardencorner.com.