

My Father's Hands

His hands were rough and exceedingly¹⁾ strong. He could gently prune²⁾ a fruit tree or firmly ease a stubborn horse into a harness. What I remember most is the special warmth from those hands as he would take me by the shoulder and point out the glittering swoop of a blue hawk, or a rabbit asleep in its lair. They were good hands that served him well and failed him in only one thing. They never learned to write.

My father was illiterate. The number of illiterates³⁾ in our country has steadily declined, but if there were only one I would be saddened⁴⁾, remembering my father and the pain he endured because his hands never learned to write. He started school in the first grade, where the remedy for a wrong answer was ten rule r strokes across a stretched palm. For some reason, shapes, figures and letters just did not fall into the right pattern inside his six-year-old mind. His father took him out of school after several months and set him to a man's job on the farm.

Years later, his wife, with her fourth-grade education, would try to teach him to read. And still later I would grasp his big fist between my small hands and awkwardly help him to trace the letters of his name. He submitted⁵⁾ to the ordeal for a short time, but soon grew restless and would declare that he had had enough.

One night, when he thought no one saw, he slipped away with my second grade reader and labored over the words until they became too difficult. He pressed his forehead into the pages and wept. Thereafter, no amount of persuading could bring him to sit with pen and paper. He did still like to listen to my mother, and then to me, read to him. He especially enjoyed listening to us read to him from the Bible.

My father was forced to let the bank take possession of most of the acreage⁶⁾ of his farmland one year when a crop failure meant he couldn't make the mortgage⁷⁾ payment. He was able to keep one acre of the farmland where the small farm house was located.

From the farm to road building and later to factory work, his hands served him well. His mind was keen, and his will to work was unsurpassed. His enthusiasm and efficiency brought an offer to become a line boss--until he was handed the qualification test.

Years later, when Mother died, I tried to get him to come and live with my family, but he insisted on staying in the small house with the garden plot and a few farm animals close by. His health began to fail, and he was in and out of the hospital with two mild heart attacks. Old Doc Green saw him weekly and gave him medication, including nitroglycerin⁸⁾ tablets to put under his tongue should he feel an attack coming on.

My last fond memory of Dad was watching as he walked across the brow of a hillside meadow with those big warm hands resting on the shoulders of my two children. He stopped to point out a pond where he and I had fished years before. The night, my family and I flew back to our own home. Three weeks later Dad was dead because of a heart attack.

I returned to my father's home for the funeral. Doc Green told me how sorry he was. In fact, he was bothered a bit, because he had just written Dad a new prescription, and the druggist⁹⁾ had filled it. Yet the bottle of pills had not been found on Dad's person. Doc Green

felt that a pill might have kept him alive long enough to summon help.

I went out to Dad's garden plot where a neighbor had found him. In grief, I stooped to race my fingers in the earth where he had reached the end of his life. My hand came to rest on a half-buried brick, which I aimlessly lifted. I noticed underneath it the twisted and battered, yet unbroken, container that had been beaten into the soft earth.

As I held the container of pills, the scene of Dad struggling to remove the cap and in desperation trying to break it with the brick flashed painfully before my eyes. With deep anguish I knew why those big hands had lost in their struggle with death. For there, imprinted on the cap, were the words: "Child-proof cap--Push down and twist to unlock." The druggist later confirmed that he had just started using the new safety caps.

I knew it was not a rational act, but I went right downtown and bought a leather-bound pocket dictionary and a gold pen set. I bade Dad good-bye by placing them in those big hands, once so warm, which had lived so well, but had never learned to write.

□by Calvin R. Worthington

父亲的双手

父亲的双手粗糙却非常有力。他修剪起果树来轻松自如，给烈性子的马上马具时也是不慌不忙，稳稳当当的。让我难以忘怀的是，当他抓着我的肩膀，指着猝然下落的老鹰或在洞穴里熟睡的兔子给我看时，从他那双手传来的那种特殊的温暖。他的这双坚实的手让他生活得很好，但美中不足的就是这双手从来就没学会写字。

我的父亲没受过教育。在我们国家文盲的人数在不断下降，但是只要还有文盲存在我就会感到难过，因为这会让我想起我的父亲，想起不会写字给他带来的痛苦。在他上一年级的時候，如果回答问题不正确的话，老师就会用戒尺在他的手掌上打10下。不知道什么原因，当时只有6岁的父亲就是不能正确记住那些形状、数字还有字母什么的。几个月后他的父亲就让他退学了，并把他安置在农场里干成人的活。

多年之后，他的上过4年学的妻子打算教他读书。再后来就是我用我的一双小手握着他的那只大拳头，非常吃力地帮助他写他的名字。这种情况只持续了很短的一段时间，不久他就显得不耐烦了，并且宣称他已受够了。

一天晚上，当他确信没人看见他时，拿着我二年级的课本走了出去，并且费劲地读着上面的字，直到感到太难了无法再读下去。他把脸埋在书里哭了起来。从此以后，无论怎样劝说都无法让他再坐下来学习写字了。但是他仍然喜欢听母亲和我给他朗读文章，他特别喜欢我们给他读《圣经》。

有一年庄稼歉收，父亲无法偿还银行的抵押借款，不得不让银行占有了他大部分的农场。他只保留了他的那间小农舍所在的一英亩地。

无论是干农活、修建公路还是后来到工厂工作，他的这双手让自己受益匪浅。他头脑敏捷，工作意识无人可比。他的工作热情及效率使他有机会当上了工头，直到有一天他被要求参加资格考试。

几年以后，母亲去世了，我想让他过来和我们一起生活，但是他坚持要自己住在那间带有小花园的农舍里，附近还养了一些家禽、家畜。他的健康状况开始越来越糟了，曾两次因犯轻微的心脏病而住进医院。格林老大夫每周都来看他并给他开一些药品，其中包括硝酸甘油片，让他在感到要犯病时放在舌下以缓解病情。

最后一次感受父亲的慈爱是上次在家乡，看着他把他那双温暖的大手放在我的两个孩子肩上，带他们走过牧场的那座小山坡，然后停了下来，指给孩子们看那个前几年我和父亲一起挖成的池塘时的情景，我心里暖融融的，但这却成了永远的记忆了。那天晚上，我和家人回到了自己的家里，三个星期后，因心脏病发作父亲离开了人世。

我赶回老家参加了父亲的葬礼。格林大夫告诉我他为父亲的去世感到难过。事实上，他感到有些困惑，因为他刚刚给父亲开了新药方，而且药剂师也按药方给父亲拿了药，但是在父亲的身上并没找到那瓶药。格林大夫认为只需一粒药就足以让他能坚持到叫人来救他。

我来到父亲的花园，父亲就是在这里被一个邻居发现的。我非常难过，弯下身用手抚摸着这块土地，父亲就是在这儿去世的。我的手触摸到了一个半埋在地里的砖块，我下意识地把它拿了起来，看到在砖块下有一个被砸得变了形的、但却仍然完好的药瓶深陷在软软的泥土里。

我手握这个药瓶，父亲拼命想打开瓶盖，在绝望中试图用砖块把它砸碎的情景浮现在我眼前，我终于痛苦地了解到父亲的那双大手为什么在与死神搏斗中就失去了作用，那是因为瓶盖印上印有“儿童安全保护盖—向下推然后拧开”的字样。药剂师后来对我说，他也刚刚开始使用这种安全瓶盖。

我知道我这样做很不理智，但我还是直奔县城，在那里买了一本皮面袖珍词典和一支金笔。我向父亲的遗体告别时把词典和笔放在父亲的那双大手里，那双手曾经是那样温暖，那双手曾经让他生活得很美满，但却从来没有学会写字。

NOTE 注释：

exceedingly [ɪk'si:dɪŋli] adv. 非常地，极度地

prune [pru:n] v. 剪除

illiterate [i'lɪtərɪt] n. 文盲

saddened ['sædnɪd] adj. 悲伤的

submittal [səb'mɪtɪl] v. 服从

acreage ['eɪkərɪdʒ] n. 英亩数，面积

mortgage ['mɔ:ɡɪdʒ] n. 抵押

nitroglycerin ['naitrəʊ'glɪsəri:n] n. [化]硝化甘油

druggist ['drʌɡɪst] n. 药商，药剂师