

The value of a Seed



Written and illustrated by:

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The Neighborhood Harvest Project began as most great things do, with a dream, a group of dedicated people, and a lot of hard work. Long had the city of Round Rock been in need of a place that encouraged people to connect with not only each other, but also with the food that they ate. They felt that these connections were very important indeed. This group decided that they would teach their neighbors how to enjoy delicious, healthy food that they had helped grow themselves.

Now a plan like this requires a lot of thinking, and the group thought long and hard about what they would like to give to their community. In the end, they decided that a community garden was a perfect answer to their needs. Using a community garden, they would help the people in their community learn how to grow food in the hot Texas weather in a way that was friendly to the planet. They would give people who lived in places where they couldn't grow a garden a spot of their own. They would teach the people of Round Rock how to rely less on things that were brought in from other towns and places and more on the things that they could grow and create for themselves. They decided that they could also use the garden to provide much needed fresh food to the local food bank and the less fortunate in their community. Each gardener would share some of his/her crops. In addition to the individual donations, there would be plots grown for the food bank and tended by volunteers.



They carefully planned and researched all of their options. They sought out the perfect place to make their dream a reality. The Bahá'í Faith of Round Rock formed a partnership with Neighborhood Harvest Project and allowed them use of their land to build the garden. After a lot of hard work, the big day came and they broke ground. The group sent a call out to their community and the community answered. It seemed like there were a lot of people who shared the same dream

and they came from near and far and from all different walks of life to help build this dream garden. Little did they know, but on that first day, the group also planted its first seed, the seed of "passion". This is the story of how that seed grew and grew and ultimately touched and changed the lives of the whole city of Round Rock.



Mr. Rolfstein had been looking for a group like this for years. He too believed in the importance of being able to see where his food was coming from and having a say in its care. The importance of gardening was something that has been taught to him as a small boy sitting on his grandmother's lap. He had carefully tended a small backyard garden at his house for as long as he could remember. He knew that gardens could be a lot of work to start and maintain, and he had always been grateful for help when he could get it. He decided to see if Neighborhood Harvest Project needed any help getting their garden going. He was so pleased to be lending a hand that he told everyone in his book club about the garden.

The next week four more of the members showed up to help. The following week two of them brought someone else along and so it went on and on. Soon the garden was full of people volunteering their time and skills. Volunteers sought help to finance the garden, shared information about classes, constructed a website about the group, and daydreamed about the future of the garden. In his eagerness to help, Mr. Rolfstein planted the seed of "volunteerism". With this seed, the garden grew with thick mulch pathways, carefully laid plots, compost bins, water barrels, and fencing. The volunteers grew as well. They blossomed with confidence, dedication, and pride as they worked.

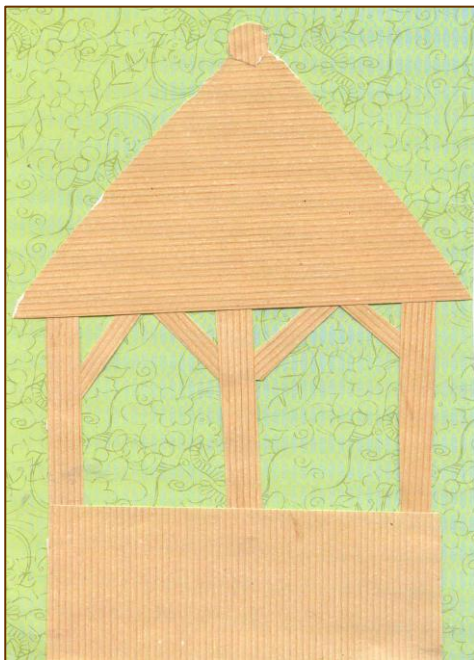
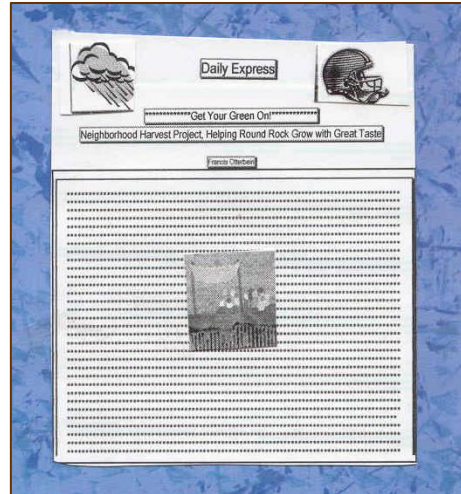


Francis Otterbein was a young journalist, just starting out at a small community paper in Round Rock. His wife Julia had been attending a book group twice a month. Julia had heard from Mr. Rolfstein about the Community Harvest Project. She had been volunteering there for a month now and was extremely pleased with how the garden was coming along. Soon the group would be ready to open the garden up for the community to rent plots.



One Saturday, Julia asked Francis to join her at the garden workday so she could share with him all that had been accomplished. While they were working, she explained that there were still a lot of things that the garden needed and a wish list for the future as well. The group was working on some fundraising ideas, which would be useful for the smaller items, but a lot of them were going to take more money than the group could raise on its own. Everyone had been so friendly and hopeful, and Francis had to admit that he too had been caught up in the excitement.

On Monday, Francis approached his boss about doing a feature on the garden. His boss agreed and with Julia's help, Francis interviewed the Board of Directors at Neighborhood Harvest Project. Two weeks later, the article ran on the front page of the paper. The phone began to ring at Neighborhood Harvest Project as local business owners asked how they could help the project along. Sponsors set up funds for needed tools and projects. One set up a scholarship fund to help members of the community who may need assistance paying to have plots of their own and attend the classes offered.



Francis and his article planted the seed of "sponsorship" in the garden and it was taking off rapidly! The garden grew with tools to use and share, a community pavilion, storage sheds, accessible garden beds, limestone pathways, and even its own solar-powered well! There were plans laid for a butterfly garden, an orchard and an education building. The business owners grew more connected to their community and through their support they drew attention to the importance of local businesses helping each other out.

Tabitha read about the garden in the paper. She had been looking for something to keep herself busy and help her meet people. Her husband had been shipped off to his second tour of duty a few months ago and she was sad and lonely in their small apartment. A garden might give her and her two daughters something fun to do out in the sun and the exercise would be nice. The thought of being able to feed herself and the girls fresh, organic food that they had grown seemed too good to be true. She had always lived in an apartment, had never gardened, and had no idea where to begin. The paper had mentioned that Neighborhood Harvest Project was holding classes as well as renting plots.

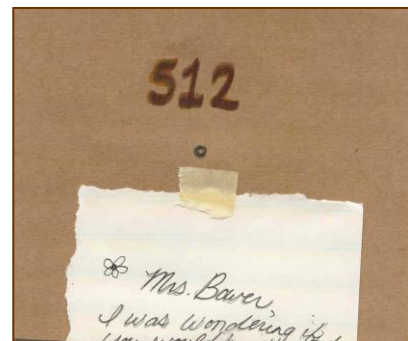
She went to their website and to her surprise found not only classes, but a community of fellow gardeners as well. There were people just starting out, like her, and people who had been gardening their entire lives. Everyone was so warm and welcoming and there was so much to talk about. It was fascinating!



Tabitha signed up for three classes. The rest of the evening she imagined the great gardening adventure that she was about to begin with her girls. She had told them about it at dinner and already there was a small drawing pinned carefully to the fridge, complete with fat blue tomatoes, pink corn, sassy, green beets, and a big, smiling purple worm with a wide brim hat and sunglasses. The girls had worked on it right up until bedtime and she couldn't help but smile every time she

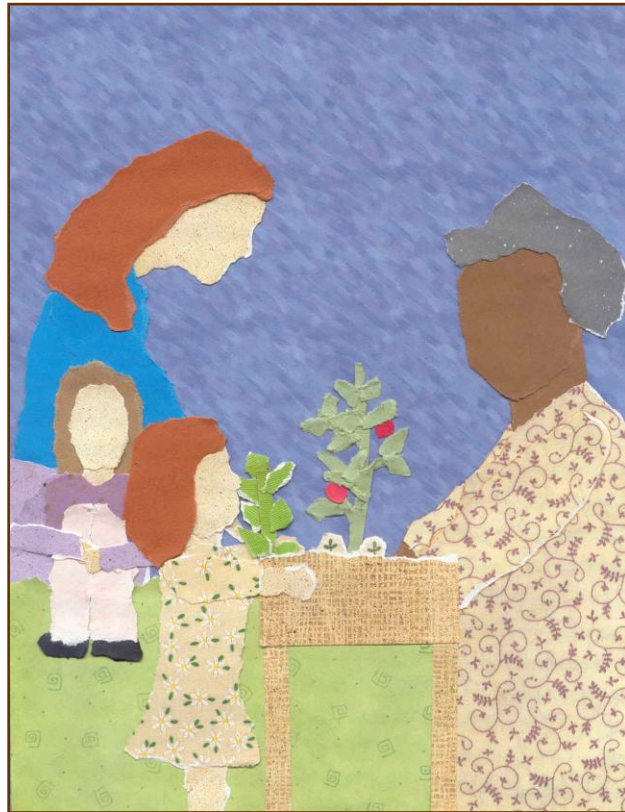
looked at it.

Right before heading to bed herself, Tabitha had a thought. She went to her computer and printed out the class list. She circled the classes that she had signed up for, wrote a small note and took it down the hall to apartment 512. She had never done anything like this before, but the small, light feeling she had in her heart told her that it was the right thing to do.



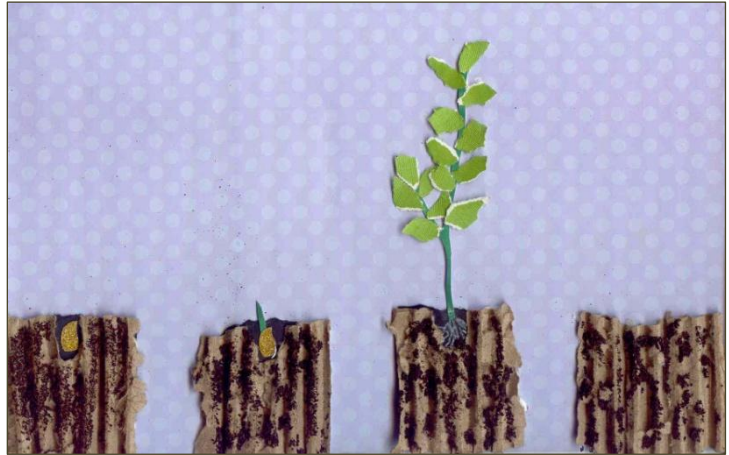
Holding onto that feeling, she drew a breath and taped the class schedule to the Widow Bower's door. That was the beginning of a beautiful friendship.

Tabitha and Mrs. Bower took every class together. Mrs. Bower rented the accessible garden bed next to Tabitha's plot. The girls ran back and forth between them, laughing and comparing the plants. Mrs. Bower had the girls over for dinner twice a week, and together they learned to cook and use all that they grew. They sent pictures of themselves and their garden and dinner parties to Tabitha's husband across the seas and they made the distance seem a little shorter.

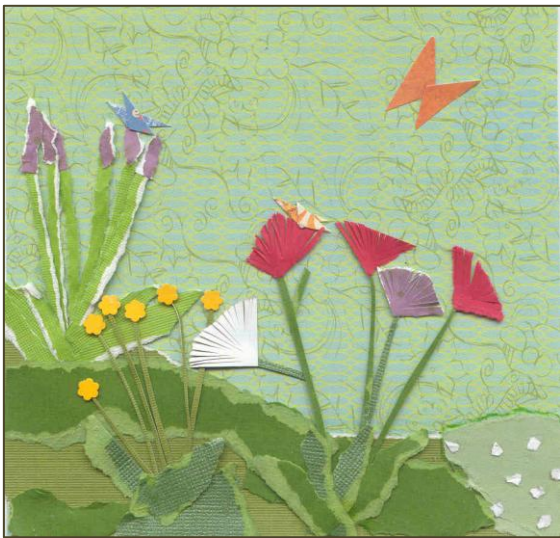


Tabitha had planted the seed of "friendship". It seemed to be a seed that was very popular indeed. Everywhere that you looked in the garden, "friendships" were popping up. With each friendship, the garden grew with diversity, beauty, laughter and tears as the people became more connected with each other. The people's hearts opened up a little more each time a new friend was made and gratitude, compassion, wisdom, and peace filled them. These things spilled over into their lives outside of the garden and they reached out a little bit more to those in need; re-evaluated what was necessary for happiness; enjoyed life's quiet moments more often.

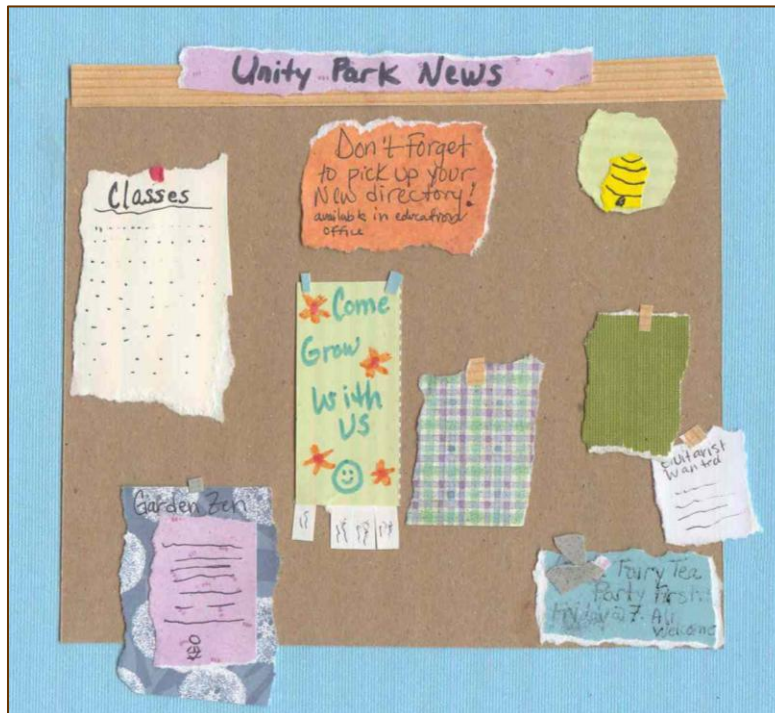
So the seasons passed. The garden grew and was plowed under time after time. Bands and acts played and moved on in the pavilion. People attended classes and gained knowledge and skills, and sustainable living became the "normal" way of life. The people in Round Rock had finally realized how important it was to be able to provide for themselves and their families in a way that worked with nature and the world around them. It was satisfying to "do it yourself".



The garden morphed and changed with each new generation of gardeners. It would look strange and amazing to the original group who had broken ground here so many years ago. In the orchard the small saplings had grown into strong sturdy trees. There was a butterfly garden, a water sculpture, a small chicken yard, and a very large sandbox with a few swings and a slide. The garden property itself had grown to encompass several acres around the original site and the number of garden plots had quadrupled.



The garden buzzed with community activities. There was a cultural fair each year with food from around the world. The Adoptive Grandparent Program held once a month fairy tea parties for children of all ages and weekly story times in the butterfly garden. There was a mother's group, a knitting group, a vermiculture group, yoga, the "Growing like Weeds" children's program, beekeepers, soap makers, and even a fledgling jam band. People came to visit with their friends and make memories with their families.



People came to take classes about seed starting, composting, wildlife gardening, cooking and preserving their harvests, vermiculture, organic pest control, and other exciting subjects. There was even a class to become a certified "Citizen Gardener". Classes filled up quickly and there were always ideas for new classes popping up. Some of the groups used space in the education center to set up demonstrations for the people of the community to come and experience their specialty. The garden itself was a living classroom with plenty of hands-on learning opportunities.

Cora sat quietly in the shade of the orchard. She could see the progress that had been made on the new pathway leading through the orchard. Here and there were small spaces that would soon be filled with bricks. Today was Founders' Day in the garden and the ceremony would begin shortly. Part of the ceremony would be the dedication of the new "Memory Path". Members of the community had been invited to purchase a brick for a path which would be engraved with the names of people who had touched their lives and had passed on.



Today she would be placing two bricks of her own. She looked down at them in her lap. She smiled when she thought about all of the memories that she held of spending time in this garden with her mother and her grandmother. She had grown up running around in the sun and picking berries from their plots and accepting small tokens from the other gardeners as well. She had learned to work the land and to be open to new people and experiences. Now she brought her three young sons to do the same. When the time came, she kissed the bricks softly and then placed them next to each other. One read "Tabitha & Kenneth Foster, grandparents" and the other simply read "Mrs. Cora Bower".



Thus grew the tiny seed of "passion", planted so long ago in the city of Round Rock, into a healthy, sturdy, and beautiful Community. In return, the Community grew seeds of "compassion", "connection", "knowledge", "self-sufficiency", "gratitude", and "contentment" and sent them into the wind to land and flourish where they are needed.