

The Watering Can

Once upon a time there was a man. He was not a special man; he was kind of your average guy. He had a good job. He lived in a comfortable home, in a good neighborhood. He had a wife and one child, a son. He had some good friends which he would socialize with regularly. He didn't have a lot of complaints and he did his best to be a good father and husband.

His parents were nice people. They had done a good job of raising their son and enjoyed the company of their grandchild whenever the time allowed. His wife was a good woman. She didn't have great career ambitions. She worked part time so that she could always be home for her son. Her priority was to take good care of the family and besides taking care of others; she also took the time to take good care of herself.

The man worked for a good company. The company was located quite a distance from the man's home, which meant that the man had to endure a lengthy commute on a daily basis.

As the man drove home on the freeway in the course of his daily commute, he would often notice a small trail, perhaps an animal trail leading more deeply into the forest that lined the freeway. He always used to wonder where that trail led, but he never bothered to stop his car and follow it as it would have been pretty unusual to do so, especially during rush hour on the freeway.

Day after day went by and as the man passed by the trail on his way home and he often felt that urge to see where it was leading. Then he would forget about it as the thoughts of the day or the upcoming evening overtook his mind.

But you know how it is with people and their curiosity. The man could never drive past that trail without wondering where it led. Everyday as he drove home, he would quietly anticipate the trail, and then once past it, he would then watch it fade away in his rear view mirror. Sometimes he would even get lost in his imagination while driving, wondering where that trail led. He would reminisce about his childhood, to the times he would go exploring, always finding something that interested him, like maybe a special rock or a pond with some frogs or maybe just nothing but an empty field which he would lay down in and watch the clouds float by.

Then one day something happened.

It was a Friday and the man had finished work a little early on a very beautiful, but hot summer day. In fact, the entire summer had been unseasonably hot and extremely dry. The man had decided to go home early that day and as he drove home the traffic was very

light. As he approached the trail, he felt a very strong urge to slow down. In fact, quite surprisingly he pulled his car over on the embankment adjacent the trail.

He was kind of excited in a way. It had been a long time since he had done something like this. He didn't know where that trail led to and he thought about whether it maybe wasn't such a great idea to pursue it, but his sense of curiosity got the best of him and he got out of his car and proceeded to walk up the trail.

As he walked up the trail the man developed a strong sense that few if any people had ever walked this path. It was a pleasant trail. It had a variety of trees, bushes and assorted plants lining it on either side. The trail didn't go very far, maybe a half mile before it ended abruptly against a fence that was bordering a private golf course.

Then another unusual thing happened to the man as he was walking down this trail. He passed by a small a tree. In truth it wasn't much of a tree. It was a sapling, maybe 18 inches high and kind of bent over and dried out. As he passed by it, he had that same curious feeling that he had felt those times when he had passed the trail on his daily commute. For some inexplicable reason he could not ignore this sad excuse for a tree. He decided that on his way back up the trail he would stop and see if he could determine why it as that this tree had such a profound effect on him.

On the way back he located the tree and immediately crouched down and carefully examined the sapling. He didn't know much about trees so he took a picture of it in hopes of being able to later recognize it in a reference book. In his mind he kind of jokingly thought that this was perhaps a fruit tree whose origins were very inglorious. Perhaps someone had thrown a half eaten apple out of their car; some animal had eaten it and then "deposited" the seeds as part of a package deal that it left on the trail. The man kind of laughed at himself as he shook off the thought and went back to examining what really was a pretty pathetic little tree that didn't appear to have any hope of reaching maturity because it already had "one root in the grave" so to speak.

Then for a moment, the man felt compassion for this dying tree. He thought to himself, I wish this tree had a chance to grow into a larger tree. Maybe then I could figure out one day what kind of tree it is and why it was that I felt so drawn to it.

Suddenly the man heard a rather large noise. Not a gunshot but more like a clunk and he immediately thought about his car that he had left parked on the embankment. "That's just great" he thought, as he rushed back to his car to see what had happened. When he arrived, he saw that his car had been struck by an object that appeared to have fallen off a truck that had recently driven by. His rear panel was damaged. This man, who never once had a scratch on his car, had now been generously rewarded for parking on a highway embankment in order to pursue a curious trail that led to nowhere.

Well, he knew that he had an insurance claim on his hands. So the man decided to find what it was that struck his car and take some pictures so he could explain it to the adjuster. The man looked around for a few minutes and then he found the object that had

damaged his vehicle. It was a watering can from Dave's Garden Service. The can even had a paint mark on it from where it had struck his car after it fell off the truck.

The man thought, Dave must have been busy this summer. It's been so hot and dry and he probably has been watering a lot of plants just to keep them from dying. Then for a moment he thought about that tree on the trail. He thought, "maybe I should go give it some water?" he then said to himself, "that's crazy, it's not going to make a difference, it's been a brutally hot summer and this tree isn't going to make it and besides that, this can is just about empty".

But this man had a kind heart and he decided he would give whatever water there was left in the can to that hopeless tree. So back he went down the trail feeling a combination of stupidity and pride for his decision. When he reached the tree, he sprinkled the remaining water on the sapling and he felt good. In fact, he felt really good, so good in fact that he got a little misty eyed. He thought..." this is nuts, I'm crying over watering a tree that will die in a few weeks". "If my friends could only see me now" he laughed to himself.

Now considering that he left his car on the embankment during what was now rush hour, he thought that he might actually have some explaining to do if one of his friends might have recognized his car parked on the side of the freeway. So he decided to take the watering can home with him in order to support his explanation of why his car was seen parked on the side of the freeway and how it had been damaged.

After watering the sapling the man returned to his car, placed the watering can in the trunk and drove home. He didn't say much about what happened to his family. He didn't know what to say and nobody asked him about how his car was damaged or why he had a watering can in his trunk.

The following Monday, the man drove to work. On his way home he passed by the trail and smiled to himself, wondering why he ever felt curious about that trail in the first place. The whole week, as he passed by the trail on his way home he began to think about the tree that he had watered. By Friday he had made a decision. He decided that he would water that tree because it had not rained at all that week.

So on Friday afternoon, he told his coworkers that he had to leave early due to a family obligation and on the way home; he stopped on the road side by the trail. He dragged a full watering can a quarter mile down the trail and watered the hopeless tree and then he hurried home again feeling those mixed emotions of pride and stupidity.

He kept his little Friday road side tradition to himself. He would create an excuse to leave work early on Fridays and then go and visit the tree. If it was dry he would bring water. If it had rained he would just check on it. Once he stuck two of those fertilizer stakes that you can put in the ground, beside the tree. He would then usually take a picture of the tree and go home.

People at work, began discussing his habit of leaving early on Friday. They never confronted him about it because he always worked overtime to finish any project and always did excellent work and was a highly valued person in the company. Some thought he had a romantic "side interest", although he did not show any other evidence. No phone calls, no other disruptions, no long lunches, no other evidence that pointed to an extra marital affair. The only noticeable change was that he had put a picture of a dried out sapling beside the picture of his family.

By the time the summer had ended, the man had decided that he could not do much more for the tree. He had watered it, fed it and kept the ground clear around it all summer and it was time to get back to his regular routine, as he too realized that people were noticing his habit of leaving early on Friday and he did not wish to raise further suspicions.

Fall came and went and the man did not visit the tree. On Christmas Eve he left early and visited the tree. He made his usual stop on the side of the highway. He took a quick walk down the trail and saw that the tree had survived the fall and might even have a chance to survive the winter. He then took a picture of the tree and trekked back to his car.

When the man got back to his car, there was a police cruiser parked beside his car. The officer, an older gentlemen asked him if was having any problems and the man said he was fine. The older man patted him on the back and told him to drink "prostate tea" which the officer said had worked wonders for him. The man politely thanked the officer for his advice and went home.

The spring came and the man checked in on the tree. Surprisingly, the tree had survived the winter. He took a picture of it and drove home.

That summer it was hot but it rained regularly. The man checked the tree one Friday and could see that the tree had become stronger. He took a new picture but decided not to put it on his desk. Instead he just kept a file in his computer with all the pictures that he had taken of the tree during his visits.

The man checked in on his tree that Christmas and the tree was doing fine.

After that Christmas visit, he only checked on the tree about once a year. He would visit the tree, take a picture, and then go on with his life. That said, he always kept the watering can in his trunk, just in case he needed it.

The years passed by and the man's son had grown up. The man had stayed on at the company and had risen to a very high position. In fact he was practically running the company and making a very good living now. He invested wisely and had accumulated enough savings to retire comfortably and put his son in the best college money could buy. He only worked only part time now, staying on because the company still needed his wisdom and guidance and he was more than happy to share it.

One late summer day the man's son came to visit him at work. He observed that his father was much respected at work and his son took pride in his father's achievement. He had always known that his father was successful but he never thought about much about why his father did so well.

During their visit, his father was suddenly called to a meeting. His son, who was sitting at his father's desk, for some unknown reason felt compelled to open his dad's computer. When it opened, the file containing all the tree pictures opened. He son studied all these pictures of a developing tree. He then quickly closed the file when he saw that his father returning but he didn't say a word about what he had seen on his father's computer.

It was a beautiful summer day that day and the son drove behind his father during the commute home. During the drive, the father got that strange urge again. He decided to stop the car by the trail and his son pulled up behind him. It had been a few years now since the man had visited the tree. His son was very curious about why they were stopping on the side of the freeway. He asked his dad what was going on but his father didn't answer him, he just signaled to his son to follow him. The son was confused and a little angry as he had just purchased a new pair of shoes which were getting ruined on this muddy trail that his father was now taking him on.

In silence the son followed his father until they got about a quarter mile down the trail. Then to his utter amazement the son stood facing the most beautiful apple tree he had ever seen, its branches were heavy with fruit. His father then picked an apple and handed it to his son. The somewhat astonished son took the apple from his father and took a bite of the most delicious apple that he had ever tasted. His father smiled, but turned away because he felt his eyes beginning to water up and he did not want his son to see him cry.

They walked back to their cars in silence. The son had forgotten about his shoes and he was stuck in a kind of wonderment about this apple tree that his father had taken him to see in the middle of a trail leading nowhere. He then thought about the pictures that he had seen on his father's computer and he began to understand.

When they returned to their cars the son looked into his father's eyes and felt a deep appreciation for his father. His father asked him if he had any questions. His son remained silent. His father asked him to come over to his car. Once his son had reached his father's car, his father asked him to open the trunk. His son followed his father's request and opened the trunk. There sat the old watering can.

His father told him to take the can and put it in his trunk.

The son picked up the watering can and then he felt a kind of pressure in his heart as he walked back to his car to put the watering can away. He felt his eyes fill with tears as he walked back to his father, he gave him a hug and they both returned to their cars and drove home.

They never discussed the apple tree.

The son graduated from college and went on to a very successful career. He now had his own office which was furnished with the most up to date, modern furniture, except for one odd, very out of place item, an old watering can that he kept in plain view in the corner of his office.

Some people thought he was a little strange for keeping an old watering can in his office but he never let that worry him. When questioned about it, he simply answered that he was saving it for his children.

Happy Trails