

## Hawks and Cherries

It is early springtime in Portland and the hawks have returned to NE 51<sup>st</sup> Avenue. You can hear their call – a sharp piercing sound almost like a whistle – and then look up and see their fast, dramatic swoops across the sky. These birds are very different from the crows and chickadees that populate this neighborhood year-round. If this year is like any other, the hawks will stay for a few weeks and then depart for their next destination.

I remember one year when I tracked the hawks to their home tree. I found small bones at the base. The hawks had been busy hunting mice and other small birds. Even the squirrels wouldn't have been safe from their talons.

There is another memory I have in the neighborhood. When my sons were young, they would walk over one block to a friend's house. One day, my dad and I headed out to pick them up. It was a beautiful summer day – the sun was out, flowers blooming. It was nice to be with my dad, just the two of us. When we arrived at the house on NE 50<sup>th</sup> Avenue, we realized that the trees in front of the house were cherry trees and they were full of beautiful perfectly ripe fruit. We stood under the canopy reaching up and grasping the cherries by the handful. The fruit was delicious. Soon, the boys came out of the house and we shared some cherries with them. We wondered about retrieving a bowl to pick some for later and decided not to. The boys ran ahead and soon we were on our way too.

My dad taught me so much that day, as he did so many other days – not with dramatic words or gestures but just by the way he savored the fruit. He was surprised at the unexpected treat, he enjoyed the cherries, and even more, he seemed to take it all in with such pleasure – being with me, the beautiful day, the mundane task of picking up his grandsons in the neighborhood.

As he got older, his ability to truly be in the moment seemed to increase. Thoughts of his childhood came to me. He grew up in a neighborhood in Detroit of similar style – houses close together, neighbors on front porches. And then he was orphaned and the Great Depression set in. How did those formative experiences shape his ability later in life to stand under that cherry tree with such enthusiasm? What did his 80 plus years teach him about the importance of recognizing small gifts like beautiful ripe cherries hand-picked on a summer's day?

I miss him and somehow he is still here with me. I am reminded of him and that day when I walk through the neighborhood, as I did this morning. The hawks are calling and soon the cherry trees will bloom.

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