

M3

Digging Dandelions

Springtime—and the dandelions are coming into bloom. Their bright sunny heads peer out from amid the lush, emerald green grass. They appear in cracks and crevasses and edges, where their wind-blown seeds easily settled last year. Like soldiers, they line up along the cement invert of our roadside drainage channel and against the asphalt driveway.

I often think of my dad at this time of the year. When I was growing up amid the glacial hills of Wisconsin's Washington County, in spring after work my father would frequently head out into our sunshine-dappled yard, tucked in a wooded valley, with his long-handled dandelion digger.

He'd walk across the grass and jab at those tough yellow-headed warriors, sever their roots, and flip them out of the ground in a rather swift motion. When he'd had enough, the uprooted dandelions were left scattered about our country lawn, where they slowly withered and shriveled, and were chewed up the next time my father rode his green John Deere mower in circles around the turf. Many of them raised their heads and transformed into puffy seed balls, sending forth another generation before succumbing. Naturally the mower helped with seed dispersal, ensuring that my father would be able seek future solitude, and escape from his wife and three rambunctious daughters, while performing this never-ending dandelion eradication task.

When I look at the dandelions growing in my northern Milwaukee County yard, I often wonder what happened to my dad's well-worn garden tool. Over the years, the varnish had rubbed off his dandelion digger and the handle was down to smooth bare wood with a few remaining streaks of red paint. In all likelihood, my mother gave the digger away when she moved from our old home after my father died and her girls married. When the dandelions peak, I find myself wishing I had that much-used, long-handled implement.

Instead, I have an ergonomically correct, green-rubber-covered metal hand tool. This one came from my in-laws about the time my father-in-law passed away. It was like new, and my husband never mentioned it receiving any use in the small Shawano yard where he grew up. Most likely my mother-in-law, who had a tendency to hoard, picked it up somewhere and packed it away, never intending to use it.

Now in the evenings when the dandelions are flowering in abundance and I feel up for a bit of fresh air, I grab my floral-print garden gloves, that green-handled digger, and a muddy, white yard-waste bucket, and head out into our suburban yard where the bright yellow dandelions are showing their shiniest faces, stoop over, snap their roots, and toss them into the pail. Like my father's dandelions, which surely regrew, mine will be back too, as most of their roots are still in the ground.

When I look over at the parkway across the street and see the hundreds of round, puffy heads waving proudly on tall stems, waiting for direction from the next breeze, I know my efforts are a lost cause, for those warriors will blow in and settle in all the exposed spots I've just made, guaranteeing that generation after generation of reinforcements will continue to flower across my lawn.

Oh well, more fresh air, exercise, and vicarious father-daughter time for another day. After all, my garden tool still barely looks worn.

###