

What Else I've Inherited

By Gloria Hildebrandt

It's a Saturday morning in July and it's going to be a stinkin' hot weekend according to the weather forecast. First thing this morning, I closed all the windows in the house to keep the interior its pleasant 20 degrees C. Last night, however, I had to light a fire in the woodstove because it had been chilly inside thanks to a day of rain and damp. I was so cold I had to wear my winter indoor booties. Crazy weather.

Right after breakfast, which I figured would be the coolest time of the day, I got geared up in my usual long work pants, socks, boots, T-shirt covered by an unbuttoned long-sleeved shirt, bug shirt with hood, and gloves. I had a wagon load of wood chips that I wanted to spread on a path.

Even with ear muffs on to protect against the tractor engine noise, I heard the

mosquitoes whining. I saw them swarming around my netting-covered face. I quickly spread the chips nicely on the path and felt pleased with myself.

Now along with the land that I inherited from my father, it appears I have inherited some character traits. One is the inability to quit while things are pleasant. Like my father, I have a tendency to push things a little. Just a little more, just a little longer.

Burning Brush

Here's one dramatic example of my father's way of working. Many years ago, when my mother was still alive, I went to my mailbox and noticed smoke billowing from my parents' front yard next door. "That's not right," I thought, and walked down the road to have a look. My father was using a shovel to beat flames from a grass fire. I went to help, grabbing a rake, and

then I noticed that he had two fires going, burning brush. He explained that because one fire was going so well, he decided to start another fire, in order to burn the brush faster. But the fires got out of hand. We spent the next hour frantically staying ahead of the grass fire that was racing through the natural section beside the mowed front yard. When the fire came to a path of cut grass, it mercifully stopped spreading and we were able to put it out. Had it jumped the path, I don't know what would have happened. This was just one instance of when my father wanted to save time on a chore but ended up spending much more time on it.

Clipping Burdock

This morning, after spreading the wood chips on the path, I remembered that I had seen two tall burdock plants ripening in a stand of natural growth. I thought I'd

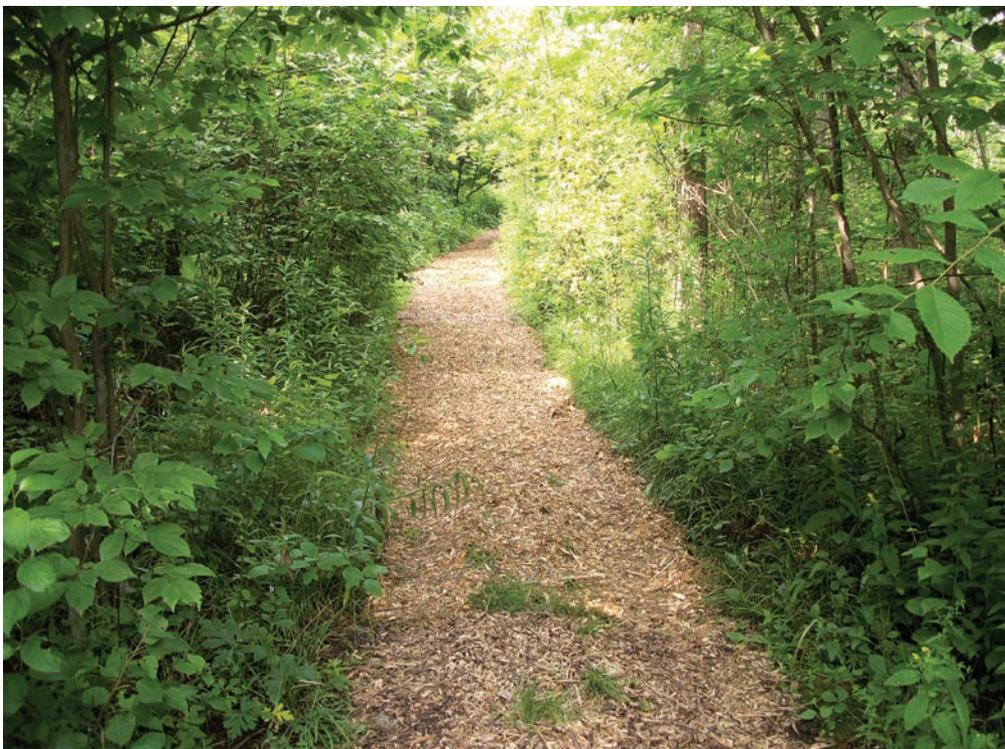
snip them off with my long clippers before they scattered and formed a million more plants. Still geared up against the mosquitoes that would be in the tall growth, I hacked away until I was able to cut the burdocks and drag them clear. Then I saw about six more burdock plants rising above the bee balm, goldenrod and raspberry plants. Swinging my clippers, stamping down plants, I inched to each burdock, bent way down, felt for the stems with my clippers and wrestled them out.

Soon I was gasping for air through the wet bug veil. My hair was soaked and covered my eyes. My glasses were completely fogged up. It was 100 per cent humidity and 100 per cent mosquitoes. I was exhausted. I was in a foul mood. When my dog Kelly tried to push into the cool house ahead of me, I yelled at her. I was just like my father. Pushing things to the limit, until tempers flare.

But I got 'er done. There's now a pile of burdock on the grass near my burn pile. If the burdock seeds start to grow in the grass, I can keep them in check by mowing. That's why I never stack burdock where I can't mow. I'll let them dry out near the firepit, which will remain the sole firepit I use at one time, however.

I realized something about myself today. I share my father's impatience and tendency to bad temper when frustrated or tired, but maybe I also have his self-discipline and high expectations of himself, and his ability to get just a little more done. I just don't know if that's good, bad or even necessary.

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▲ Wood chips spread neatly on a path. PHOTO BY GLORIA HILDEBRANDT.