

## Seeds of a Healthy Life

by *Keith Scott Dickerson*

“I can understand why she does not want to go hiking” our near-adult teenage daughter whispered to us. We were in the morning preparation stage for a multi-family hike. Our friends’ daughter was ten years old and was coming up with all sorts of excuses for delaying the departure to the trailhead, yet not outright refusing to go hiking nor expressing unhappiness with the plan. My daughter further explained, “She has hike anxiety. I used to get it all the time at that age.” Apparently, a large part of the anxiety was not knowing at that age how long the hike would be, due to not really understanding what “3 miles” versus “5 miles” even entailed. A lack of control and a lack of understanding conspired to create hike anxiety.

In our extended family, multi-generational walks and hiking have always been group activities. I recall fondly walking with my maternal grandparents in the woods around their year-round cabin. At many family gatherings, an after-meal walk was understood to be on the menu, often between the main meal and dessert. I think there was an element of “earning your dessert,” as well as a common-sense thought that a walk improved digestion, a concept that has, to some degree, been born out by modern medicine and research in terms of blunting post-prandial hyperglycemia. Research has further shown, in so many ways, that exercise of any sort, even short bursts, is the best medicine we have for controlling blood sugar and blood pressure, as well as promoting mental health. One unfortunate happenstance of the mid-20th century in our country was the proliferation of refined foods – white bread, white flour, white sugar and all the processed, packaged foods that have stable shelf life, stability created by removing fiber, and which introduce an abundance of simple sugars in our meals. We now understand the importance of complex carbohydrates, including nuts and seeds, which not only have fiber and complexity, but also protein and fat. Seeds are nutrition-packed vessels that have dual miraculous properties, providing shelf stable sustenance as well as providing the potential to grow new life under the proper conditions.

As parents and adults, we metaphorically both distribute and plant seeds of behavior, of morality, of wisdom, sometimes consciously, sometimes not. Our best actions provide in-the-moment nourishment. Even when our role-modeling and speechifying seems to fall flat, we hope that perhaps a seed has been planted, which might, under future conditions, take root and germinate into something mature and magnificent.

My parents took me hiking when I was growing up, and I well remember that at some point, I did not want to go hiking with them. Later as an adult, when I would come home to visit, we often went for a hike together, and I admit that I felt a twinge of guilt at having gone a decade or two without meaningful hiking with them – lost opportunities. I was an unruly, strong-willed teenager, and despite their best attempts, I had to learn the hard way in so many ways. I eventually found my way, getting an education, but more importantly,

trying to be of some service to others in my vocation. I would like to believe I also grew into a generally moral, kind, productive human being.

Hiking and recreating in the outdoors is how I have recharged my compassion batteries and filled by empathy bucket for the last thirty years. When I was younger, I could not understand the length nor complexity of life's journey, focusing on the angst of the unknown of the present moment. I could not appreciate what my parents were role modeling. I now see my parents and my family scattered numerous seeds along the way, some providing sustenance in the moment, some lodging in cracks for later sprouting.

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