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When Juniper Was Three

I built mortarless rock walls, with wide planters at the top, in the garden of the place we took care of in the dredge tailings of Sumpter, Oregon.

Juniper was three. She played close to me. I lifted a large rock into place, packed gravel and soil into place around it and began to prepare the soil for another rock. Juniper climbed up the rocks to the planter at the top of the wall I worked on, where raspberry roots migrated from the garden and sent up new canes.

I placed another green and black, flat rock as large as I could lift. Juniper dug in the dirt and collected small, different colored rocks. She backed on her hands and knees to the rock wall, reached down with her feet, then turned around and sat in dirt. She said, "I can't get down."

I said, "You got up there. You figure out how to get down." My intention was to aim her toward independence. I had the basics of raising my daughters down fairly well, but sometimes I needed further instruction.

Juniper said, "I already tried. I'm just a kid. Somebody has to take care of me."

I said, "Yeah. I saw you try. You make sense." I lifted her down. I gathered the rocks she had dug from the planter at the top of the wall and put them down where she could reach them. She sorted through the rocks, took some of them to the hose and washed off the dirt, brought them back, and arranged them in patterns on the ground close to where I worked.

I raked, shoveled, and stacked rocks toward completion of the wall. Juniper and I were pleased with the day, grateful for warm sunshine soaking into us and the garden. We shared quiet work and companionship and learned together about rocks, gardens, and helping each other.