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654 words

Published in *The Christian Science Monitor*, September 25, 2013.

## **The Unplanned Bounty from Our Untended Garden**

We moved into the house with a pear orchard behind it near Gold Hill, Oregon, in my seventh winter. The next spring, my dad took a construction job in southern California, and we took off, with plans to return to our home when his job ended.

Some of the plants in my mother's laboriously established garden grew ankle high before we left.

Laddie, our energetic, squeaky-voiced ball of puppy-soft collie fur, enthusiastically entangled ankles and received lots of love from my three brothers, my sister, and me. But we couldn't take Laddie with us to California. Five children, two adults, and an energetic pup were too much for one car, my dad said. We all saw he was right and reluctantly stood behind his decision.

Aunt Jesse, my mother's sister, would stay at our house and take care of the place. She held a full-time job, so no one dared to hope the garden would survive.

She would take care of Laddie, she assured us. He would stay in good shape.

We set out. My mother wiped away tears for abandoned gardens and hopes of settling down in one place and soon had us all singing, "California here we come/ Right back where we started from/ Where bowers of flowers bloom in the spring." The land grew ever more bountiful and supported flowers of many different colors as we drove south.

We traveled to a construction site in southern

California and then to others in Nevada and Arizona. My siblings and I played in the Sonoran Desert, where bright sunshine heated the day to 110 degrees F. We sought shade, wore hats, drank lots of water and lemonade, and kept moving forward with our lives wherever we were.

While we were gone from home, western Oregon's spring and early summer rains kept our garden growing. Drier summer settled on the land. Our garden would have given up in despair for lack of water, but the irrigation ditch that ran around the hill above our place gave way where some innocent ground squirrel dug through the bank and started a rivulet that became a stream and then, as more dirt washed away, a torrent. Water that had been flowing toward orchards and hayfields south of our place flowed into our thirsty garden and orchard and watered them deeply before workers got to the ditch and repaired it.

We came home late in the summer. We drove up our long, dirt driveway and got out of our car. My heart pounded in rhythm with deep, resonant barking when a huge, long-furred dog bounded from behind the house. Maybe he would eat me alive, but my older sister assured me, "This is Laddie."

"Laddie?" I squeaked. "Laddie is a puppy, this big."

"Dogs grow," my sister said. Laddie smelled me, nudged me with his nose, and welcomed me home even if, at first, I didn't pay him the respect of knowing him.

And Mom's garden? Oh my.

It had grown into a tall jungle. The corn was as high as an elephant's eye and growing straight up to the sky. I got lost in the thick tangle of plants. Weeds grew green and in wonderful health, yes, but food also grew everywhere, lush and ready to harvest.

We ate corn and squash and carrots, beans,

rutabagas, turnips, garlic, onions, tomatoes, peppers, melons, potatoes, pumpkins, and pears. There was more food than even a large family could eat fresh, so Mom boiled and canned the extra, and we ate food from the garden long after we left the garden and the pear orchard behind and traveled to other jobs in far-to-travel places.

That was the first time I realized that home lives and grows and prepares for the future and welcomes us home even when we adventure hundreds or thousands of miles away and are not there to see its changes. I've never forgotten that lesson about life.