

**For Posterity**  
**Rhonda Hovan**

*Originally published in the Golden Retriever News*  
*Reproduced in Lighting the Fall, Fall 2006 with permission*

My Dad grew up on a farm, and farmed for a living as a young man. His first three daughters spent their early childhood on the farm, but I was not so lucky, because my Dad had moved his young family to the city by the time I was born. Still, it's probably true that you can take the boy out of the country, but you can't take the country out of the boy – at least in my Dad's case. Our city lot was double deep, and we were the only family in the neighborhood that had rows of corn and other vegetables instead of a lawn in the backyard.

My Dad also introduced me to rescue. Except in our case, the rescues were not dogs, and one never knew what critter my Dad would bring home next: orphaned baby hawks and owls, a nest of crows from a fallen tree, even an injured snapping turtle. My grandparents taught my Dad when he was very young about responsibility for animals. As a child, one of his chores was to feed and water the chickens before school. One especially cold winter morning, he gave them only water, planning to feed them after school when he hoped it might be warmer. As he sat down to breakfast that morning, his mother placed only a glass of water in front of him, while she served a warm meal to his sisters. When my Dad protested, she calmly but firmly told him that if it was good enough for the chickens, it was good enough for him. He went to school hungry that day – but always cared for the animals properly afterward.

My Dad's sense of responsibility was deeply ingrained, and manifested in many ways. It drove him also to plant trees. Of course, there wasn't much room for trees on our city lot, but he had planted many on his farm. One day when I was in my late 20's, he took my husband and me on an excursion back to his farm. Many years and several owners had come and gone since he'd been there, so he was a stranger to the current residents. But my Dad knocked on the door, introduced himself, and asked if he could show me around the farm.

Curious, but with a little suspicion, the owners tagged along while Dad began my tour. Behind the house stood a stately and sprawling tulip tree, its branches reaching across the lawn like giant protective arms. From the lowest branch some 25 feet in the air, hung a tire swing. "I planted that tree," my Dad told me proudly. He recounted the story of searching the nearby woods for the perfect tree, branched just right; and of digging such a large root ball that he had to drag it on a tarp behind a horse to get it back to the house. He ended by saying, "I knew that someday, that tree would have a swing hanging from it."

By this time, the new owners were smiling and laughing about the hours of fun their children had swinging from that tree. Their suspicion had melted, and we all enjoyed many more stories as we continued to walk around the farm. As we left, they thanked my Dad for the tree, and mentioned that it was a shame the tree had been so small when he sold the farm, that his own children hadn't

been able to swing from its branches. “Oh, I knew it wasn’t for us when I planted it,” my Dad replied. “I planted it for the next person.”

Years later, perhaps following a genetic urge passed down from my Dad, I bought my own farm. My family’s favorite spot on the farm was a grassy area near the lake, where a mammoth oak shaded a weathered picnic table. One sunny summer afternoon, I was throwing bumpers into the lake for the dogs, while my three sons lunched under the tree. A car pulled up, and an old man slowly emerged and walked over to us. He took in the scene for a quiet moment, and then said, “I planted that tree.”

This had been his parents’ farm, and Homer shared with us his still detailed memory of finding the perfect tree, branched just right, to plant in this spot, some 60 years before. As they listened to the story of how long it took three brothers to drag the tree across a wide field, one of my young sons marveled, “That was so hard! Why did you do it?”

“I did it for you,” Homer answered. My son’s concept of time and tree growth was that of a four year old, and his eyes got big. “Did you know me then?” he quizzed this stranger, who looked like he must be someone’s grandfather. With twinkling eyes, Homer answered, “I didn’t know you, but I knew you would make good use of the tree.”

My Dad passed away several years ago, and Homer followed shortly thereafter. My children are grown now, and I have since sold that farm; and there is a new generation of children picnicking under Homer’s oak, and swinging from my Dad’s tulip tree. In time, the stories about how those trees came to be where they are will fade, but the trees themselves remain as evidence that someone cared. I think that would be enough for both of these men.

The generations pass even more swiftly in dogs. A decade can see three or more generations of dogs. A couple of generations of breeders can even come and go in a decade. What kinds of responsibility do we who breed today, have to those who will come after? Are we supposed to be planting trees?

One way the next generation – people we will never meet, never speak to – can tell we cared about our breed, is from the paper trail we leave. But despite all of their best intentions toward the dogs, there is a tendency for breeders to overlook the importance of a paper trail. The most common example of this is that many breeders who diligently have eye, heart, patella, thyroid, and other examinations and DNA tests performed on their dogs, do not certify those examinations and tests with CERF and OFA. Consequently, within a very short time, it is almost as if the information from these examinations ceases to exist for the next generation of breeders – people who will be depending on knowledge of those pedigrees. Without any publicly available documentation, there is no way for anyone to look up data which may impact these future breeders and their dogs. And with the detail, depth, and breath of information potentially available on public Internet data-bases, this is a sad and needless loss.

Some people feel that certifying clearances is a waste of their money. I suppose that my Dad and Homer could have felt that planting those trees was a waste of their efforts too. But they knew better. Actually, I suspect that both of them thought of it simply as their responsibility. But I prefer to think of it as a gift, and to think of them as men with vision.

**Responsibility. Gift. Vision.**

Yes, these words can apply to health certifying clearances too. Like planting a tree, you do it not for yourself, but for posterity.

*Note: (E. Sell). Like planting the trees and certifying health screening tests, please consider participation in BeaCon's open health registry as your responsibility, gift,*

and vision for the future of Bearded Collies.