



LEGACY LAW

Protecting the assets in your family tree

Family – how does your garden grow?

A garden to me was something my Dad got me to mow in rows – “like the cricket pitch at Lord’s”, he encouraged. John Updike said words to the effect that golf was nature tamed. I grew up with lion tamers!

We bought our house from an elderly couple who were moving to live closer to their adult children. I thought the interesting thing about them was that he was a Judge who presided over some famous cases. I like the idea that I wrote my book “Be A Better Ancestor” in the same room as he wrote some of his judgments and, later, his memoir.

I realised after much later, as usual for me, that his wife’s work was just as interesting. They raised a few successful adults but I did not know them. What was clear was the work she did in their garden. She was, I was told, a permaculturist. I had that in the same category as “naturist” so had to look it up. Words might be correct and have an interesting (to some) etymology but the marketing people would surely say “nah, no-one will buy that”.



I learned that permaculture, in very layman terms, means establishing an environment where one living thing supports another or assists it to thrive: one plant’s seeds may nurture another or the insects that visit (?) one part of the garden may scare away bugs that otherwise damage a neighbouring part. Even dead things turned into mulch that was good for the chickens. Yes, I am not an expert. Mrs Legacy Law is the expert.

Jay Hughes says, “As it takes 150 years for a copper beech tree {read a great family} to mature, plant today because there is no time to waste.”

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We got rid of the chooks as they attracted rats which was too much nature for us city slickers. We planted new plants which are currently “going off” in the tropical summer in Sydney.

It dawned on me while on the internet planning long eco-walks in Tasmania and New Zealand that nature was also in our back yard. The lessons from nature were there to be learned from, just like my three hour zoom calls with my fellow students at the Family Systems Institute. We impact our environment and it impacts us – often unconsciously. We may think we are above plants and animals but we are in a biosphere with them and, more influential, with our family members.

We are all complicit to a degree. For the nerds (you know who you are), in Family Systems theory, Edwin Friedman’s metaphor in “A Failure of Nerve – A Society in Regression” is that chronic anxiety is a room filled with gas vapours which could explode on the lighting of a match and, when that takes place, people blame the striker of the match rather than those who did not try to release the fumes.

The signs of family conflict are often there but we ignore them or misunderstand them. When professionals or families assume that what is worrying them is causing anxiety it is like blaming a blown away tree for causing the tornado that uprooted it. I like the wind metaphor in Family Systems theory, that we cannot see anxiety but rather its affects in the trees. But we need to look at the metaphorical trees.

As I say to my clients when congratulating them on their philanthropic work, “philanthropy is giving to strangers. Do you want to be more conscious about what time and resources you give to your family?” Sometimes, we view our family as unruly but loveable pets. We train them to the point of our skills and patience and then send them mixed messages. Our presence and constant observation changes them. Schrödinger's cat anyone?

Back in the garden, we also got rid of some of the old plants and, while not quite concreting it, put down a lawn. We get to lie in a hammock, throw a ball and pick up dog poo. My most enjoyable garden experience, apart from meals with family and friends, is watching our son mow the lawn. After initial reluctance, he too looks back on his work with satisfaction and enjoys the smell of the cut grass.

Of course, some of the previous owner’s plants still bear fruit and we get an over-supply of grapefruit, mangos, pomegranates, longans and lady finger bananas which, after making all the jams and Grapefruitcello possible, Mrs Legacy Law enjoys giving away.

Is it time to fertilise your own garden?

Be a Better Ancestor. <https://www.legacylaw.com.au/shop/be-a-better-ancestor/>

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