

My father and I were attending a lodge function recently, when, as I was helping him up some steps, I noticed something... our hands. They were the same. They were scarred, worn and weather beaten by the sun and years of use and misuse, of manual labor.

As we sat down and the meeting started, I began to think about my uncles and grandfathers on both sides of my family. They were builders, ranchers and lumbermen; as well as machinists, artists and inventors. We were all men that worked with our hands... prewired to build, create, and fix the things around us. The hard work and physical labor were just part of the deal. Our hands were the tools that allowed us to channel our energy and creativity.

I have always thought that physical labor has gotten a bad rap. It seems that many people think of it as demeaning or something to be avoided, especially if you are getting paid for it. I guess I understand that. Most everyone wants their child to have a good education and then a good paying job that does not require hard labor and dirty hands. And historically, if you are going to punish someone, you typically don't tell him or her to "Put on that suit and tie and grab a brief case!"... You make them do something physically demanding and dirty... for a very long time.

As I thought about the variety of professions of the men at the meeting, I was reminded that although I enjoy doing a great many things in life... writing, playing music, debate and science, the truth is... *I really love working physically hard.* Regardless of what it is that I'm doing; shoveling, sweeping, picking up garbage, building something... as long as it is work... there is just something soothing about it, when your body's engine is running smooth, your mind is concentrated, yet relaxed; at peace, with a sense of purpose.

As the years have passed and I have become more "successful", I rarely get the opportunity to work physically like I used to. My job now is basically to accomplish a great variety of tasks so that others will also have work. I suppose that is why I respect someone who works and works hard...regardless of what that job is. There is honor in doing a job well that you enjoy... that allows you to be happy, fulfilled and healthy.

I have always gotten a great deal of good-natured ribbing from some of my puzzled friends over the years. "Why are you out there working so hard?" I have never really had a good answer. I have just known that I was compelled to do so, for a reason that I had never quite understood.

But as the meeting concluded and I reached down and helped my father to his feet, I remembered how many times he had done the same for me... and I understood.