



Finding Treasure in a Used Bookstore

Used bookstores are a great place to look for treasure.

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Used bookstores are a great place to look for treasure.

Especially for someone who enjoys fixing things. And even for someone who doesn't, but recognizes that it has to be done.

I have always been fascinated by the inventor, the creative craftsman who can take perfectly useless junk and turn it to a valued purpose, someone like my father's father.

It always seemed that he could fix anything.

One of my older brothers told of a time when a bearing had frozen to a shaft on an implement.

In short order, out of scrap bolts and bits of steel, Grandpa Ruen had fashioned a "puller" to bust the bearing loose.

My dad, in his rush to be a "successful" farmer, didn't have that gift, nor do any of my siblings or myself. It is a gift, often born out of necessity.

Grandpa, with his small farm in the hills of northeast Iowa, had had no choice. He couldn't afford to hire things done or buy new, so he learned to do.

He was a carpenter who built his own barn and outbuildings, a blacksmith who made his own tools, a craftsman who fashioned skis and toys for his children and grandchildren and an orchardist, beekeeper and horseman.

Arnold Hexum, a boyhood friend of my father, came from a large and wealthier farm up the road.

He once told me how much he enjoyed visiting my grandparents' home.

"They had apples and nuts that lasted all through the winter," he said. Arnold recognized that wealth came in many forms.

In his later years, Grandpa would spend long weeks of his summers with us, fixing and mending things about the farm. Only after Grandpa was gone did my father realize how vital that fixing was and what a role Grandpa had played about the farm.

I was too young to appreciate that wealth of creativity and craft. Now that I am older, it's too late to ask him to teach and share...which brings me back to used bookstores and treasure.

I have become a collector of books with titles like Practical Skills, Back to Basics, Old Ways of Working Wood and Down Home Ways. Old and new, they are filled with ideas and answers to questions not yet asked.

So when I am faced with a task I don't know how to do or a need I didn't know I was going to have, I turn to my books and treasure yet to be found.

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