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My father feared laziness in me the way he feared cancer in himself. "Life is mostly work, not fun," he once told me, as if it were an axiom on which my future survival depended. The odd thing was that he thought work and life would be different for me than they were for himself. He was a professor and author who relished his job, whose job, in fact, was also his hobby, and his favorite thing to do. As I raked up cut grass on our large back lawn on a steamy weekend in June, I would hear him in his study, pecking away at his old Underwood typewriter, making a music in the soft summer air that was both digital and deep. I could hear those dense, carefully calibrated sentences falling into rows like lines of cold metal type as I raked soft grass up into dark green piles.

His concern for my diligence would increase after the sound of the mower had ceased, and the raking began. He would come out quietly through the garage every hour or so; ostensibly for a breath of fresh air, but in reality to see if my rake was properly in motion. As time went by, his remarks on my slowness and inefficiency rankled increasingly. The lawn was large, and the hours it took to rake in the hot sun were long. It got to the point where I would hear the pecking of the typewriter cease, know I was due for an inspection, and prepare myself.

When my father emerged from the garage he would see his son balancing the yard rake on his little finger, as high above his head as possible, doing a little waltz to keep the slender shaft pointed toward the heart of heaven.

Out he would charge into the yard, yelling and sputtering with all the puritan indignation of his Scottish Canadian forebears. I was lazy, I would always be lazy. I was doomed to a life of menial labor. There was no hope for me. It was my mother's fault, the Hungarian in me, the dreamy Slav leaking out. She hadn't raised me properly, and on and on. It was a touchy situation. Have you ever tried to keep a rake balanced on the tip of your finger, pointed at the center of the sky while your father is shouting at you? It requires concentration, discipline, selfhood; tools every artist must acquire.

My father's fear was never justified. Before I was out of high school, I owned a brand new motorcycle earned exclusively from yard and outdoor work for people in the village. But sometimes to this day, in the heat of summer, even if deadlines are approaching, I will rise from the keyboard, and escape into the yard. And sometimes, while listening to the birds, I will pick up a rake, heft it, bend a tine or two for balance, and thrust it up into the summer sky.

Rod Clark, Editor