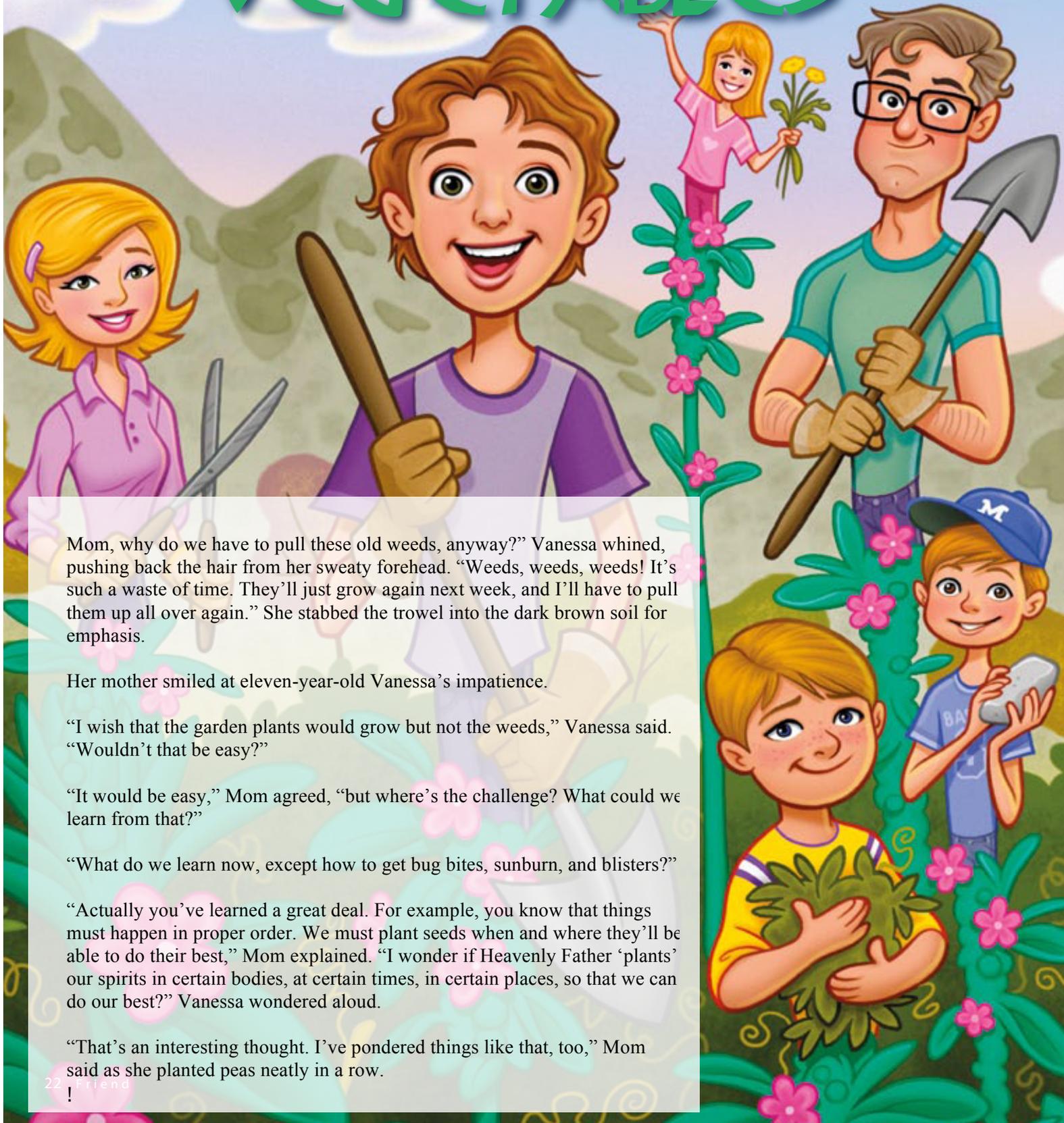


# HOME-GROWN VEGETABLES



Mom, why do we have to pull these old weeds, anyway?" Vanessa whined, pushing back the hair from her sweaty forehead. "Weeds, weeds, weeds! It's such a waste of time. They'll just grow again next week, and I'll have to pull them up all over again." She stabbed the trowel into the dark brown soil for emphasis.

Her mother smiled at eleven-year-old Vanessa's impatience.

"I wish that the garden plants would grow but not the weeds," Vanessa said. "Wouldn't that be easy?"

"It would be easy," Mom agreed, "but where's the challenge? What could we learn from that?"

"What do we learn now, except how to get bug bites, sunburn, and blisters?"

"Actually you've learned a great deal. For example, you know that things must happen in proper order. We must plant seeds when and where they'll be able to do their best," Mom explained. "I wonder if Heavenly Father 'plants' our spirits in certain bodies, at certain times, in certain places, so that we can do our best?" Vanessa wondered aloud.

"That's an interesting thought. I've pondered things like that, too," Mom said as she planted peas neatly in a row.

“Maybe I had to be born to this particular family, in this place, at the exact time that I was born, in order for me to develop and reach my full potential,” Vanessa said thoughtfully. “OK, we do learn things from gardening,” she admitted. When she saw the triumphant look on her mother’s face, she added, “But I still don’t understand why we have to go to all this trouble to have homegrown vegetables. Store-bought ones are just as good if you ask me.”

“A half hour a day isn’t much time to spend when you consider all the rewards,” Mom said. “By the end of the summer you’ll see what I mean.”

Each day after school, Mom and Vanessa got on their gardening clothes and worked side by side in the garden. One afternoon in late spring they transplanted tomato seedlings. After working in silence for some time, Vanessa said, “Plants need sun, air, water, and nutrients from the soil. We need sun, air, water, and nutrients from food. Mom, would we die without the sun?” They talked for twenty minutes about the similarities and differences between plant needs and human needs.

During other gardening sessions, Vanessa told her mother about school, her friends, her hopes and plans for the future, her worries and fears. She began to look forward to these talks.

Sometimes while they gardened, Mom told Vanessa stories about what it was like to grow up on a farm. One day she said, “My mother used to tell me: ‘You reap what you sow. If you plant cucumber seeds, you get cucumber vines and cucumber blossoms, and, eventually, cucumbers. You’ll never get cauliflower from cucumber seeds. If we sow acts of kindness, we reap friendship and happiness.’”

“But if we sow evil and unkindness, then we reap the consequences—unhappiness and sadness,” Vanessa added. They were silent for a few minutes before Vanessa asked, “It can take a long time to see the results of what you’ve sown, can’t it, Mom?” She was thinking of a girl who had started at their school before Christmas and was extremely shy. Vanessa had been nice to her, but it had taken until February to get the girl to respond. But Vanessa’s persistence paid off; the girls were now good friends.

One day in June, after three days of rain, the weeds suddenly shot up tall. “We have to pluck out the bad plants so that the good ones won’t be robbed of the nutrients, moisture, and root space. Does that remind you of a scripture story?” Mom asked. “You mean when Christ will take all the wicked and burn them as stubble, and the good people won’t be bothered anymore by their evil influence?”

“Good! You’ve been reading,” Mom said, nodding approvingly.

“It also reminds me of the parable about the seed falling on the rocky soil, getting choked by weeds, or growing in good soil,” Vanessa continued. “We have to try to get sin out of our lives so that the seed of faith can grow in good soil within us.”

“I think she’s got it!” said Mom, laughing along with her daughter.

Once when Vanessa complained about all the work, Mom said, “It’s not much different from having neighbors or friends.”

“I don’t see the connection,” said Vanessa.

“If someone has a need, we serve them. Later, they—or someone else—may help us. Right now it’s our turn to help the vegetable plants. But in a few months, they’ll be serving us—on our dinner table!”

In July there were two weeks with no rain. Vanessa’s arms became stronger and stronger from carrying buckets of water. She prayed for rain and hurried out early each morning to check the plants. When it finally did rain, she danced barefoot in the backyard.

Late in the summer, Mom said, “Vanessa, have you noticed what a trim figure and lovely, healthy glow you have? It couldn’t possibly be from working in the garden, could it?” Her eyes twinkled merrily.

Vanessa realized that her mother was right. She felt prettier, healthier, and stronger than she’d ever felt before. Mom’s right, she thought. You do get a lot from gardening—more than just vegetables.

By the end of August the whole family was involved in canning and freezing the garden’s harvest. Still, there were more vegetables than they could possibly use. “Dad, wouldn’t someone at your work or one of our neighbors love a basket of fresh zucchini or tomatoes?” Vanessa suggested.

They canned spaghetti sauce, and Vanessa could hardly wait to invite the new neighbors for dinner. When they arrived, Vanessa sat down with them and told them all the wonderful benefits of gardening.

Mom winked at Dad as Vanessa enthusiastically added, “Tonight we’re having spaghetti with sauce made from our own vegetables. And salad and zucchini, all from our garden. Mmmm! You’ll love them. They’re lots better than store-bought vegetables!”