

RECEIVING IT FORWARD: WHAT PRIDE WON'T SAY

Chapter 1: The Patch Between Us

It wasn't a big lawn. Just a thin strip of grass between my house and Burt's—the kind of space no one notices, but everyone passes through. Twelve feet wide, maybe. Just enough to push a mower across in two swipes. But for me, it became more than turf. It was a threshold. A space where quiet service lived.

Burt had lived in that house for decades. The kind of neighbor who kept to himself but always had a warm wave. Retired from the phone company. Wore the same Cardinals ballcap every day I saw him. His back had started giving him trouble. His wife, Nancy, was fighting cancer. The last thing he needed was to worry about mowing.

The first time I cut Burt's side, I hadn't even planned to. I was already out there, sweat on my brow, the mower humming beneath my hands. I looked over and saw his grass standing taller than mine, weeds curling at the edges. I didn't ask—I just kept mowing.

The next week, I did it again. And the week after that.

Eventually, he noticed. I saw him one afternoon standing in the driveway. He watched me for a moment, then shuffled

across with that slow but steady gait of a man used to doing things himself.

“You didn’t have to do that,” he said.

“I know,” I replied. And that was enough.

Burt was never one to gush. But something softened in him after that. I’d see him out with Nancy sometimes, walking slowly along the sidewalk. Once, he brought a folding chair out to the edge of the driveway and just watched as I mowed.

We didn’t speak much. But something passed between us all the same. A nod. A wave. A look that said, “I see you.”

It reminded me of Pops. He lived to 96 down in Destin, Florida. A man built by decades of Army Air Force service, oil stains, and discipline. He kept everything immaculate—tools in order, grass clipped tight, edges sharp. Even as his body began to protest, he refused to let anyone take over.

“I can still do it,” he’d mutter, dragging the mower out with stiff legs. It wasn’t about the grass. It was about the pride.

Eventually, my mom stepped in. She hired a lawn service. He fought it hard—but the heat, his knees, and time finally won. Still, I remember how he stood at the window the first day they came, arms folded, lips tight.

It's strange to watch someone go from the one who helps to the one who's helped.

So maybe it was his voice in my head when I mowed that patch beside Burt's. Maybe it was a quiet promise to honor the men who never asked for help—and to offer it anyway.

For five summers, I mowed the length between our homes without fail. Front to back, trim to edge. Every pass of the mower was my version of prayer. When Nancy passed away, I showed up at the service. I didn't speak. I just stood in the back and listened. Sometimes showing up is enough.

Burt started staying indoors more after that. The chairs stayed folded. But I still saw the blinds move when I mowed. I knew he was watching. And I kept mowing.

One hot July afternoon, I was finishing up when he opened his garage and walked out slowly, wiping his hands on a rag.

"Why do you do this?" he asked.

I rested my foot on the mower deck, wiped my forehead, and met his eyes. There wasn't frustration in his voice—just honest curiosity.

I thought of all those years of my father doing things no one noticed. I thought of the quiet pride of men who give without needing to be seen. And I said,

“I’m paying it forward.”

He stood there a moment, nodded once, then turned back toward the garage.

It wasn’t about the lawn.

It was about the line between two homes. The invisible one made stronger by presence, not permission. A bond built not from borrowed sugar or barbecues, but from showing up—even when no one asks.

Last summer, Burt finally sold the house and moved closer to his daughter. I mowed his yard one last time. A new family lives there now. Young. Kids with scooters and sidewalk chalk. The patch of grass still grows between us.

I still mow it.

Because some lessons stay with you.

What Life Is Teaching Me Here

We often associate giving with strength—and receiving with shame. We celebrate self-reliance, but rarely do we honor the sacred act of letting others carry us. Somewhere along the way, we bought into the lie that receiving means we’re failing. That we’re weak. That we should only ever give.

But real community—the kind that holds us when we're tired, that shows up without being asked—depends on both. Giving and receiving are two parts of the same breath. One fills, one releases. And when we only exhale, we eventually collapse.

Burt never asked for help. Neither did Pops. Their pride wasn't arrogance—it was protection. A shield built by years of hard work and the belief that value comes from doing. But when they let me show up—when they accepted the gesture, the mowing, the quiet support—they allowed the circle to complete. And in doing so, they gave me something just as powerful: the permission to serve, to give without needing thanks.

I've come to believe that receiving is an act of strength. It says, "I trust you." It says, "I am still worthy, even if I can't do it all myself." It opens a door for others to step into their better selves. It gives someone else the chance to act on the kindness stored up in them. And it teaches us to live beyond our limits—not in fear, but in fellowship.

I've also realized that we aren't just paying it forward—we're *receiving it forward*. Every time someone shows us grace, we store it up like sunlight in winter. We don't always use it right away. Sometimes it rests in our bones until someone we care about needs it. And one day, without fanfare, that warmth spills out of us and lights someone else's path.

My job wasn't just to mow the lawn. It was to honor a legacy of quiet love. To live what others had modeled for me. To

remember that a simple act can echo across years, shaping how someone else sees themselves and the world. And to be humble enough to know that someday, someone will be mowing my grass. Not out of pity—but out of memory. Out of love. Out of the same spirit that once mowed between the lines for them.

It's a hard thing, to accept help when you've been the helper. It pokes at pride. It threatens identity. But what I've come to see is this: it's also a gift. A chance to teach others how to serve. A chance to pass on the unspoken knowledge that caring isn't weakness—it's the glue that holds us all together.

So the question is: Will I be able to receive it with the same grace Burt and Pops showed me?

Because sometimes, receiving is the next form of giving.

Receive It Forward

Today, give someone the chance to show up for you.

We often think we're sparing others when we say, "I've got it," or "Don't worry about me." But what if saying yes is the greater act of grace? What if letting someone in—really in—is how we build the bridge we always wished someone would cross for us?

That might mean saying “yes” when someone offers to carry the groceries, or sitting quietly with a friend who doesn’t have the right words but brings their presence anyway. It might mean letting your adult child fix the fence you used to fix yourself, or allowing your neighbor to bring over a plate of food without saying, “You didn’t have to.”

Let them mow the lawn. Let them bring the meal. Let them sit with you in your silence. Because when you receive their care with humility and gratitude, you’re not taking from them—you’re giving them the opportunity to give.

Reflect: What rose up in you the last time someone tried to help you? Was it resistance, embarrassment, or something deeper?

Act: Say “yes” this week when someone offers to help. Let them. Don’t apologize. Don’t diminish the gesture. Just receive.

Journal: Who has shown up for you in quiet, meaningful ways—and have you ever told them what it meant?

Bonus Practice:

Make a list of the people who’ve poured into you over the years. Reach out to one of them with a call, letter, or act of kindness. Don’t wait for the eulogy to say what they meant. If it feels

uncomfortable, good—lean into that discomfort. That tension is pride making space for gratitude.

Think about someone whose words pulled you through a season. A teacher. A neighbor. A friend who didn't know they were saving you. Write down what they gave you, and how it changed you. Then tell them. Show them. Or, if they're gone, carry it forward in their name.

Because this world doesn't need louder voices—it needs more steady hearts.

The patch between us isn't always made of grass. Sometimes it's made of trust. Of letting someone else plant seeds in your life—and choosing not to pull them up out of pride.

Sometimes it's made of unspoken love. Of quiet loyalty. Of showing up for each other in ways no one else sees.

We may never get to say the perfect words. We may never repay those moments exactly. But the beauty of grace is this: it doesn't ask to be repaid—it asks to be remembered.

Let the patch grow. Let it be tended by time and tears and kindness.

Be the one who receives it forward—with gratitude and grace.