

Springtime

by Jack Swenson

As March gave way to April, Jake began his yearly battle with allergies. His hearing went from bad to worse, he had dizzy spells, and his stomach hurt from worrying about the precarious state of his health.

One day on their daily walk, Bert told Jake that the day before he had gone to an AA meeting where he ran into Bob D., a mutual friend. Bert said that Bob had discovered that he had diabetes. "Other than that, he's doing great," Bert said. He was going back to Kansas to see his mother in a week or so. Bob's mother was ninety-five years old, still living at home, but she was afraid that her kids were going to put her in a retirement home.

Bob told her not to worry. "We're all so old and our memories are so bad," he said, "that if we moved you, we wouldn't be able to find you."

Bert also said that somebody else at the meeting was complaining about his high blood pressure, and Bert repeated what Hank had said, that he was glad to have any blood pressure at all. Hank was Jake's age; he had emphysema, but he didn't complain.

For some reason, Bert's report lifted Jake's spirits. Nothing gladdened the heart like hearing about somebody else's troubles.

One fine spring day, Jake and Kate spent the morning planting flowers on a bank behind a pond in their back yard. Kate had purchased the plants the day before. Jake broke up the soil with a shovel and a heavy iron bar and then added potting soil. Kate followed behind and dug in the plants.

They had been working for an hour or so when Jake decided to take a break. "Drink your water," Kate said. Jake stood up and took off his gloves. He sat down on a planter box and took a swig from a bottle of Arrowhead.

He watched his young wife work, her small, gloved fingers black with dirt, plying the soft earth around a Columbine. She's good at

this, he thought. I can learn from her. Sweating from his labors, Jake felt happy.

The phone rang, and Jake went into the house to answer it. It was his friend Kaia calling from Minnesota. Kaia asked what Jake was up to. "Oh, not much," Jake said. "Being spiritual."

"Me, too," Kaia said. "I just took a walleye out of the freezer for supper."

