



What Happens When You Plant a Seed

Tyrell Jordan is a lawyer. He is not the gardening type.

His experience with agriculture is limited to this: When he was about 10, enjoying a sweet peach behind his mom's home near Finley Avenue in Birmingham, he had a thought.

I'm gonna stick this pit in the ground.

So he did. He dug a hole and stuck it in. He came back a few days later, expecting to see a sprout and ...Nothing.

I told you he was not the gardening type.

So he forgot about it and went on with life. He finished high school and the University of Alabama and came to see his mom. She pointed out the back door.

"There's a peach tree out back," she said. And there was.

After all that time that little thing took root and grew. It never did turn Jordan into a horticulturist. He gets his hands dirty with law. But it planted the seed.

So when a rental house Jordan owned in West Birmingham burned, he wondered what to do with the land. He wasn't going to rebuild, but loathed the notion of another vacant lot.

He had a thought. And that's where Marquita Hall comes in. Hall, you see, has a whole different appreciation for gardening.

She got it from her granddad, who loved to work in his yard. He grew vegetables to feed his family. But age caught up with him and the labor of constant watering became too much. He stopped gardening because it was simply too hard.

Then he stopped eating as healthily as he once had, and eventually died of a heart-related problem.

Hall believes he would have lived longer, and better, if he had been able to keep up his garden. She believes it so strongly that she started the Foundation for Inner City Enrichment to help cultivate gardens in poor communities.

So when a mutual friend, Toby Marcus, introduced her to Jordan it was like the peach pit sprouting.

They became an unlikely team, a lawyer whose agricultural experience consisted of a peach pit and a young woman passionate about green space. With Marcus, their liaison to the corporate world, they sought something better.

They are, of course, not the only ones who see urban gardens as a way to improve diets and lives in food deserts, to turn vacant lots into gardens for the city soul. But that's OK. They just want to improve the plots before them.

They want to start by installing water systems automated by smart solar technology. The goal is to teach the science and the art of gardening, to improve the neighborhood aesthetic and involvement, and to create sustainable gardens that won't break the backs of those who want to help.

Last month the trio learned the team had been accepted to compete in a SUNY Polytechnic Institute challenge to bring solar access to poor communities. It could bring a lot of prize money, and it certainly will bring training and resources to their effort.

They may or may not get the cash. I don't care. I can't help but think they already won.

Just like all those who try to do something a little better for their communities in Birmingham or anywhere. They could walk away and let things die. Or they could dig a hole. And plant a seed.

Funny thing about seeds. They grow into something magical.

A few years back, when Jordan almost died in a car wreck, his mother went to that peach tree and picked enough fruit to make peach preserves. She brought it in a jar to her son as he recovered. But he never ate it. Instead he put it on his desk and it sits there still.

It is a reminder of what a little pit can become. If only you put it in the ground.