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An enormous tree dominates my grandparents' back yard. As a child, I played amid its branches or in the piles of leaves it shed in fall. As an adult my family and I often take refuge in the cool shade it casts on hot summer days.

I can't tell you exactly how old the tree is. All I know is that it's been there for all 29 years of my life. According to my grandmother, it was there when she and my grandfather bought their house. And that was over fifty years ago.

What I can tell you is this: that tree's persistent presence has quietly shaped my family's activities over the years in much the same way that my grandparents' strength and character has quietly shaped my family's lives.

I can't recall everything that transpired under that tree. But certain

The Lumpia Tree

Offering tasty reminders of
the value in sharing

images jump to mind: ice cream made in the shade when friends or relatives came to visit, a carpet of leaves to be raked, a circle of lawn chairs that grew as neighbors wandered over to visit with my grandparents.

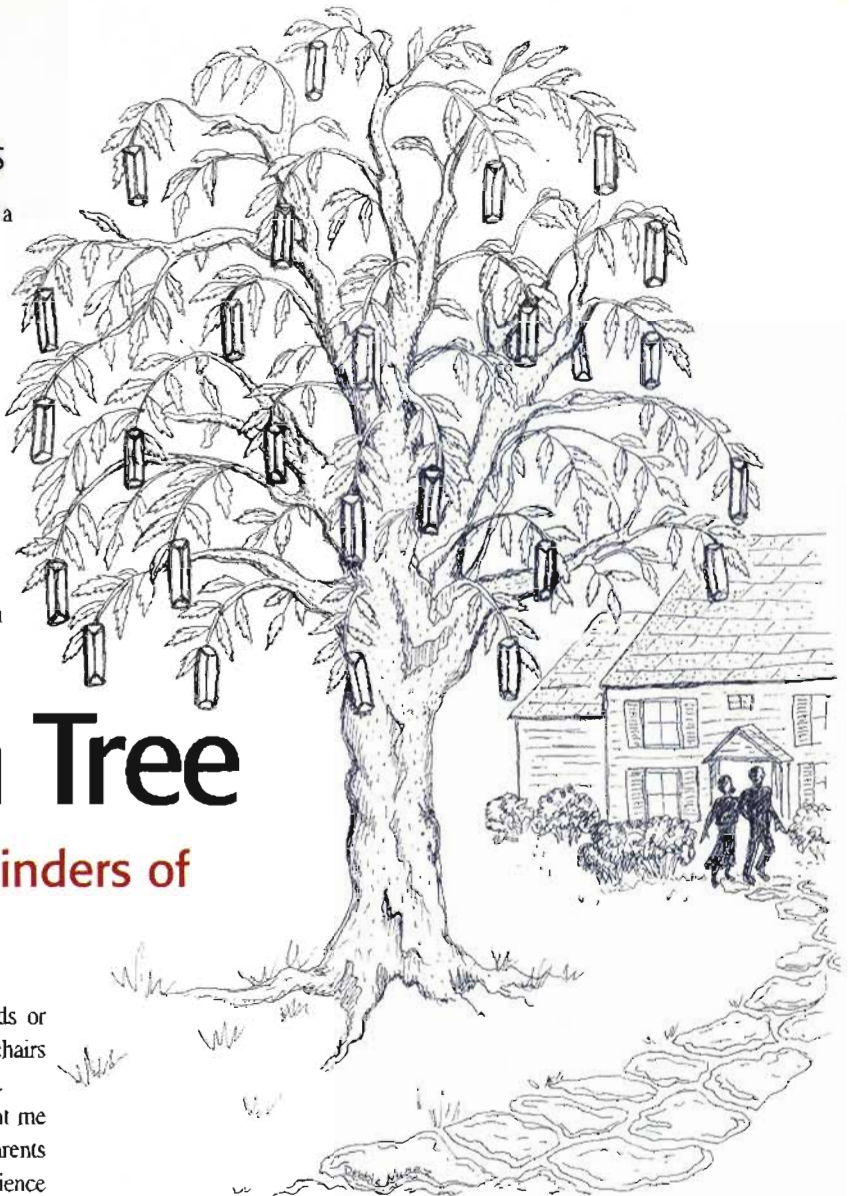
Similarly, I can't recount everything that my grandparents taught me over the years. But, again, certain memories stand out: my grandparents encouraging me to pursue my talents, my grandfather counseling patience as he and I built some project in his garage, my grandmother explaining the importance of financial responsibility (although I'm still not sure she's convinced I've learned this lesson!).

Perhaps part of the reason I can't isolate those lessons is that my grandparents didn't just teach them. They lived them. The values they endeavor to pass along to me are an integral part of their character. And those values, coincidentally, are the reason that backyard tree got the nickname "The Lumpia Tree."

No one remembers exactly when it started. But what we can agree on is that one day several years ago Kim, a charming Korean woman, stopped on the street beside my grandparents' house and struck up a conversation with my grandfather.

Driving through the neighborhood, she noticed several yards with chestnut trees. Since she often used chestnuts in her cooking, she hoped to find someone that would part with them.

Now we ate chestnuts on occasion. I can remember my grandfather showing me how to carefully peel the shell away with a pocket knife to reveal the tasty yellow nut inside. But we certainly had no use for the profusion of chestnuts that fell annually from the tree's branches. They just



weren't a staple in my grandmother's Southern-cooking repertoire. So, of course, my grandfather told Kim to help herself.

After collecting about half a five-gallon bucket full, Kim tried to give my grandfather ten dollars. He, of course, refused. Kim told him to use the money to buy food for the dog she saw running around the yard. Again, he said no.

That's all he could say. Generosity and sharing are just too important to them. And if the truth be told, they were happy to see someone making use of the chestnuts—frugality is yet another of their virtues.

But Kim was not dissuaded. And her values would change the face of my grandparents' dinner table as well as the name of the tree. A few days later, she returned with a token of appreciation that she felt sure my grandparents would accept—a bag of homemade lumpia.

My grandparents and I often ate Sunday lunch together after church. Because of Kim's contribution, Chow Mein and lumpia soon became a regular menu option. Eventually a tradition was born. Each October, the tree produced chestnuts for Kim and lumpia for us. Each October, we would peer up into the branches of the Lumpia Tree and wonder when the first egg roll would drop. **HR**