

## The soil of our lives

I woke up early to a crisp Saturday morning and was filled with a nervous, bubbly energy. I'd always valued the times spent on the farm on Saturday mornings because the tasks took me away from the chaos of my mind. I'd enjoyed the feel and smell of the soil in my hands, the fellowship of my fellow workers and the joy of being with the animals. I drove from my home and arrived on time and quickly assigned a task. The day was cool and a regular helper was already outside trimming trees. I was stationed along the perimeter of the property and clearing rocks to make room for the lilies I was going to plant around the fence. In the midst of the activity, I realized that this was not my property, yet I was a fellow worker with a common goal. The reality is that the Living Waters Farm in some way belonged to many people. This got me thinking about how we invest in each other's life. It is a lot like working on the farm together. I look to the Living Waters Farm and see the imprint of the lives of former residents, supportive community members and the Sohn family. It's a place that has opened itself to the world and has become something that a community must build. We are all helpers on each other's soil, the soil of our lives.

Sung and Myra Sohn are ultimately responsible for the health and well-being of the Living Waters Farm. They have a social obligation to keep the property running. They do this by paying the mortgage on a regular schedule. They continue to ward off animals that could harm the crops. They provide nourishing water and natural fertilizer to keep the plants producing fruit and the roses blooming. They grow greens that need to be healthy and nutritious for local restaurants. They choose to grow in a sustainable way. However, what's unique about the farm is that they choose to open it up to the public several years ago. They choose to share the vision of the place. They invite others to help, to bring unique skills and knowledge to make the place more beautiful. And they protect it from those that could harm. It occurred to me that, in the same way they share the property to others in the hopes that they could make the place better and be a beacon to the community, we too can have people invest in our soil, open up our souls to friends, guard our hearts from harm and be good stewards of our own life. It's that choice, having people invest in our lives that makes living more fulfilling.

Strong social support is incredibly important from a physical and mental health perspective. In 1989, a paper in the journal *Lancet* showed that breast cancer patients who participated in a support group lived two times as long and the control group with an added benefit of having less measurable pain. In addition, social support can help in coping with stressors. According to Sheldon Cohen, PhD, social connections can help buffer the effects of stressors by providing material help and emotional support. In addition, human connection can affect how one takes care of oneself and improve self-esteem and a sense of greater control over one's life. Numerous studies since have shown the effects of social support to be improved health, including fewer cardiovascular events, decreased likelihood of getting a viral infection, and a host of other health benefits.

We have our struggles, we have our challenges. Let us share with others, invest in the soil of our being as co-laborers, to strive for a good life. Together we can make something far more beautiful from each of our lives than we ever could by ourselves.