

A Dirty Path

By Kayla Miller-O'Higgins

During the summer of 2005, my husband (then boyfriend) Isaac finished his path.

Times were rough for us. We had decided that he should stay with his aunt and uncle for a while, and I would remain in Portland to finish Beauty School. Judy and Sonny (his aunt and uncle) are hard working people, and encouraged Isaac to work hard that summer as well. His work was in exchange for room and board.

Before he moved to Veneta, Isaac was a hopeless lay-about. Work was not high on his list of priorities. Early that summer, Sonny had given Isaac the plans to construct a garden path. It needed to be in a "U" shape around the front garden, with circles on each tip of the "U". He said that it needed to be dug about six inches into the hard packed dirt, and that he would have as long as he needed to finish it. He wanted it done by the end of the summer. Late in August 2005, the path would be finished. First, Isaac had to overcome his habit of procrastination.

In late June 2005, Isaac and I were unable to afford the apartment we were living in and something had to change. It was not going to be for too long, just the summer, we promised. When Isaac got to Judy and Sonny's, he was anxious to be there and to be starting something new in his life. The April before, he had left college and didn't know where his life was heading. He was desperate for a new beginning in a familiar place. Isaac grew up in Eugene and spent a lot of time at Judy and Sonny's house. This was no new territory for him, although he began to see it in a different light. I, on the other hand, was stuck in Portland living with my Mom, and eagerly looked forward to next Saturday afternoon.

When Isaac first got to Judy and Sonny's, it was wonderful. They were happy to have him there and he was just glad to be there. They spent many nights talking and playing board games. Many days were spent enjoying the sunshine out in the garden. The weekends were full of barbecues and margaritas (though on occasion they were a little too limey). There was no place that I had ever felt more comfortable. We had so much fun in fact, he had forgotten his promise to Judy and Sonny. He agreed to work at least an hour and a half a day, though he was allowed to let it build so that he could do it all in one day at the end of the week. Isaac was expected to do mostly yard work (Judy and Sonny have an expansive yard) and some household stuff such as dishes, vacuuming, etc. After the first month, he owed around 20 hours of work. Sonny grew tired of Isaac's laziness and pressured him to do more than the bare minimum.

When beginning the path, he had no clue where to start or how it would turn out, but he knew he had to start somewhere. First he used a pickaxe. This didn't work so well for him. It took about three minutes of swinging before his arms were cramping. There wasn't much to see in the first couple of weekends. I didn't notice anything other than his blistered hands and complaints of sore muscles. It didn't seem to me that it was ever going to be finished. Much to my surprise as the days became longer, his complaints lessened. Not before too long, a path began to appear. After trial and error and the search for better tools, his work became more productive. Once he finally found the right tools and execution, it only took about three weeks to finish. He would never look at his work the same way again. For the first time, I saw him determined, happy and proud of what he had done.

I remember looking at the sad little hole in the ground where he started and thinking, "this is pathetic," and "it's never going to happen." As the weekends rolled by and he finally began to make progress, my feelings changed. His patch of dirt was becoming something more and so was he. After all of his procrastinating, when the sun set on the last day, Isaac had finished his path. He poured a part of himself into that path and made a dirty patch of earth into something beautiful. I was so proud that he had finally finished what he had started. Now we had a place to sit and drink margaritas.

After a long courtship, Kayla Pulver married Isaac Miller-O'Higgins on January 12, 2008.