



Issue 60, June 2025

Hi Steve R,

Poppies live flashy lives, and before you know it, their blooms disappear, seemingly overnight. A couple weeks ago, this patch was bursting with orange. Now there's just one tiny blossom clinging to a stem in this scraggly area. These volunteer plants are now entering a different phase of beauty that only comes from maturity.



This is catmint, which has a captivating fragrance nothing like catnip. It, too, is beginning to fade as California strolls into its long, dry, brown groove of summer.



Old expressions of beauty give way for new expressions of delight: this year is shaping up to be a bountiful year for tomatoes! I'll keep you posted whether you like it or not.



When I was younger, I never gave much thought to Father's Day beyond sending a token gift to my dad and calling him. In the pantheon of holidays and observances, it's definitely in the lower echelon. (Halloween being undisputed at the top of that list.) This year I've been reflecting on the concept of Father's Day and expanding it beyond biology, barbecues, and beer.

It really doesn't take any degree of skill to become a biological father; guys have been producing offspring for hundreds of years at least. Perhaps more, who can say for sure? In fact, that's probably the least meaningful qualification for being a dad. Maybe we can freshen up this stale holiday by considering fatherhood as more of a concept than a literal definition.

I think Father's Day can be a time to acknowledge (celebrate, if you want) anyone who chooses to take on a fatherly role in some capacity. Someone who offers guidance, who listens, who teaches, and who makes space for someone else to grow. People in our lives who show up in quiet, steady ways. People who pass things down. Not just knowledge, but confidence, encouragement, and patience: often unintentionally.

In many ways, that's what my dad did for me. He wasn't the type to offer step-by-step instructions. As a kid, I don't recall him ever asking if I wanted to build something with him. But he let me hang around while he did stuff. He let me watch, and learn, and absorb. I just liked being around him when he was using tools. I picked up so much knowledge that

just stuck with me.

Years later, when I bought my house in 2001, my dad was both proud and envious. I had an entire garage to set up a dedicated workshop, no cars allowed. It was a privilege he couldn't imagine, living in Colorado where a garage needs to shield cars from blizzards and ice and other environmental torment.

He loved coming to visit, sometimes twice a year, and we spent hours in my shop together. We rarely built things. Mostly we just sat on stools out there, sometimes late into the night, just talking. Well, that and drinking beer. (Who remembers my beer fridge back in the day?)

Sometimes, we'd tinker on something small, or he'd help me fix something around the house. I began to notice that he was learning things from me. We even made a few woodworking projects together. One time we made a really dorky looking picture frame out of pallet wood, back when pallet wood projects were all the rage. Another time we made a tapestry display holder for a thing my grandma made. He absolutely did *not* want to be filmed for YouTube content, but I managed to make a couple of videos with him anyway. Those visits were about being together. The shop gave us a place to connect.

Over time, his visits became less frequent and gradually it became clear my dad was entering the early stages of dementia. In a few years, our long conversations stopped. Phone calls became harder. When he did visit, we no longer sat in my shop bullshitting about Shakespeare or the California gold rush. He could no longer use tools, but he lit up with memories when I brought out some of my grandfather's old tools. The last time I remember having an engaging conversation with him was around 2015 or so. I miss it deeply, but I'm grateful for those shop nights. For a little while, he got to see the kind of life and work I was building and knew he was responsible for much of it. Although he never understood YouTube culture lol.

It's easy for me to attribute so much of who I am to my dad, but it overlooks the equally important father figures and mentors I've had in life, only for shorter periods. Back in my award-winning* [2023 Holiday Extravaganza Newsletter](#), I related the story about my stint working in a movie theater when I was 17, and about how the manager and the projectionist played such pivotal roles as I was entering adulthood.

I left my job at the theater because Dayton (the manager) recommended me for a job as a maintenance technician for Mann Theaters, a large chain of movie theaters in the Denver metro area. I had no idea what I was getting myself into, but I was 18 and considered it my first "real" job. (Today I would call that my fake job, but that's a topic I covered back in [April](#).)

I had autonomy and felt like a big shot. I worked mostly independently and ate an Egg McMuffin every morning and drank coffee from a refillable glass McDonalds cup. You can get away with that diet when you're 18.

There were only three of us in the maintenance department for the entire region. Brian

was the other guy like me. He was just a few years older and had a baby, a fact that seemed so exotic. The boss was a man in his late thirties named Tom Daughery. (It's been 40 years so I can use his real name. It's in the public domain or something by now.) He was short, had a wickedly dry sense of humor, and would say the most inappropriate things within our little group. He was the most unbusinesslike boss I ever worked for. Naturally, we got along great.

One of the theaters in Aurora (Denver suburb) was designated as our office, which consisted of a tiny room on the second floor. Generally the three of us would only meet there on Monday mornings talking a little about the week ahead while filling the tiny room with cigarette smoke. The rest of the week, I would get a phone call every morning from Tom telling me where I needed to go and what work needed to be done. Sometimes it was 7 a.m., and other times I would end up calling him around 10:00 and waking him up from a hangover. It was my first job where I didn't have to punch a time clock.

We fixed everything from popcorn machines to broken screen curtains to soda fountains. Sometimes we cleaned movie screens. (You wouldn't believe how much soda, candy and other crap people threw at screens back then!) I remember installing running lights down the aisles of one theater and replacing a drinking fountain in another theater. My work taught me about plumbing, electrical stuff, and carpentry. I fixed doors and wobbly theater seats. I got to work with people from Dolby installing speakers in a new theater construction.

And mostly I had no idea what I was doing.

My first week on the job I shadowed Tom and got a feel for how the system worked and how he interacted with the theater managers. I watched as he repaired things. It reminded me of hanging around my dad when I was a kid, handing him tools and just learning through osmosis. Although, Tom was much more willing to actually teach.

I had no idea that in the second week, I would be let loose on my own. I vividly recall meeting in that little office and panicking when Tom dispatched me to repair a broken popcorn popper at some theater.

"Wait, wait? I don't know anything about popcorn poppers!"

OMG, I remember his laugh so well. He never even considered holding my hand and showing me how to fix a freaking popcorn popper. Instead, he reached onto the bookshelf filled with equipment manuals and handed me this three ring binder containing the schematics for the popcorn popper.

He just chuckled and said, "You'll figure it out." How did this guy have full belief that some 18-year-old rando could do this?

Thankfully, Tom was a big shot who carried a pager, so I could have nearly instant access to him. When I needed help, I would use the theater's landline (dial 9 first) and call his beeper.

Then he would find a phone wherever he was and call the theater where I was, usually within ten minutes. And someone working there would holler that the call was for me. Bleeding edge technology.

He never got impatient with me or belittle me in any way with my questions. But he was the first person to teach me that everything is fixable if you take it apart, think logically, and don't panic. This was such a revelation after recently graduating high school where I learned that everything needed to be *taught* in order to be learned.

Tom made me feel capable. That always stuck with me.

Speaking of sticking, things rarely went smoothly. The first time I tried repairing a soda fountain, I didn't realize you needed to shut off the CO2 tank and syrup lines first. I ended up blasting a stream of sticky Coke syrup all over me and the massive mirror behind the concession stand. This was during operating hours with customers and employees around to witness. Some kid (about my age) working the concession stand handed me a towel. I spent the next thirty minutes cleaning sticky goo off everything, including futile attempts at un-sticking myself.

I just wanted the whole incident to quietly disappear, but for a pre-internet era, it was astounding how fast the word spread. It wasn't long before I got a call from Tom. I was genuinely scared he was calling to fire me.

But the first sound I heard was him laughing hysterically. He wasn't angry or didn't shame me in any way. "Well, I guess you won't make that mistake again!" He taught me that life is filled with lessons to learn on our own.

I had to put up with Brian's NSFW sticky jokes for a week.

There have been many people like Tom and my dad throughout my life. Men who made a profound impact in shaping who I am, and yet probably never knew it. Men like Clay, my mentor in photography school, who introduced me to Beat poets, taught me alternative ways of appreciating art, and encouraged me to move to San Francisco. Or Richard, the owner of a design firm I worked at, who allowed me to set up a digital imaging department in 1995 even though I had no idea what I was doing. Maybe "fatherhood" is providing the space and trust for people to discover what they are capable of.

I just had my 17th anniversary of making videos on YouTube. That's a lot of time, a lot of projects, and a lot of people. Sometimes I forget that those videos can be meaningful to folks. But then I'll post something like last month's low-effort spray lacquer video, and I'll read the comments and see people saying, "I learned woodworking from you 10 years ago," or "I started my own woodworking business because of you." It always humbles me. These comments aren't really about lacquer. They're about connection.

I don't think you need to be a parent to be included in Father's Day. You just need to care enough to help someone believe they can do something they didn't think they could.

That's worth celebrating this Father's Day.

**in my mind*

Also, June 16th is Father's Day! And that means it's time for my annual sale on all my woodworking courses. Buy one (or all three!) for yourself or gift it to someone in your life. I know I mention this all the time, but there is simply no better way to learn woodworking than [The Weekend Woodworker](#). It is the number one best-selling method available online. You need absolutely no experience. It's a step-by-step approach that will have you building actual, usable furniture in your first weekend. I can't recommend it enough, and there is no better time to dive in than right now! **20% off of every registration!**

But hurry, this offer ends when Father's Day ends!

– Steve

Give Dad the Gift of Woodworking

As I mentioned above, in honor of Father's Day, I'm offering 20% off every course registration! If you (or Dad) have been thinking about joining, there's no better time than right now.

[The Weekend Woodworker](#) features 6 practical projects for inside and outside your home. It's perfect for complete beginners or those looking to sharpen their skills.

[Powered Up](#) will advance your woodworking with 5 stunning, larger projects. It's suitable for ambitious beginners and seasoned woodworkers alike.

[The Weekend Workshop](#) guides woodworkers of all skill levels through transforming their space into an efficient, organized workshop. It includes 15 space-saving projects, layout tips, detailed plans, and more.

Simply click the links above before June 16th and the promotion will be applied automatically.

Interested in gifting the course or have a question? Write to my team at team@theweekendwoodworker.com for assistance.

Monthly Project Feature

Transform your garden into a vibrant oasis with my [Springtime Garden Bench Plans](#). This is one of my favorite springtime projects. It's pretty easy to make and all you need are seven 2x4s. Plans are available on a pay-what-you-want basis at [ShopWWMM](#).



Reader Mail

Hey Steve,

I've been following you for over 5 years now, as long as my woodworking journey. I was with a man for 18 years who was very controlling, and when we (my kids and I) got out and moved back to Wisconsin, I realized that my money was mine, and if I wanted to pursue a lifelong dream of woodworking, I could! Your videos were instrumental in helping me get down the basics I needed to begin – no one does it like you do, with every detail planned out and even the mistakes (and solutions) shown. It was in the '90s that I first saw a beautiful walnut table with a butterfly joint holding a crack together – that was the seed that you finally helped me grow into a "woodworking seedling" in the last five years.

Your newsletters are probably my favorite now that I work more toward my own projects and designs. After many of your more California-inspired projects, I realized that I needed my own style and direction, and I landed on Craftsman style, like my 1919 home (which I grew up in). One of my first all-on-my-own projects is this bed I made for my daughter. I did make a big mistake, though. I had some hardware that I needed to make a trench hole to attach – but I realized the trench hold had to be 1/2" deep while the wood was only 3/4" – no material to hold the screws!

After cursing myself for several days, where I was thinking of just attaching a random

block of wood, I channeled your advice and thought, "What about a design element?" I don't think of myself as very creative, but this ended up being the coolest part of the bed. Other things didn't work out, like the cool through-tenons I had planned on making, but overall, I was pretty happy with a mostly hardware-free bed. Thanks for all your inspiration over the years. I recommend your channel and paid projects to everyone I know thinking of getting into woodworking. I have a long way to go to get to the level I want to be at, but the journey is what makes it worth it, and I couldn't have done it without you.

Thanks again,
Kat

And PS it was a tough relationship. I think woodworking gave me something nothing else could. Your way of teaching is so low pressure. Sometimes the others, like Wood Talk, are so intimidating. Your "approachable" approach makes even us broken people feel like we can do it. I'm gonna stop now before the tears really fall – thank you.

– Kathleen



Gorgeous bed! There seems to be that moment of realization among woodworkers when we free ourselves from the "rulebook" and understand we have the power to create things however we like. We discover that there are no real setbacks, just new and unplanned paths to completion. (Also, allow yourself to banish the sentence, "I don't think of myself as very creative" from your vocabulary. 😊) —Steve

Steve,

Awesome newsletter (Issue 59). This really got me thinking (rethinking) how I go about life, especially at my stage in life.

My dad was also very set in his ways, especially as he entered his senior years. Although I admired my dad for what he achieved in life, I always thought he was being too close-minded. There is always more than one way "to skin a cat." As I have aged (currently, 67) I find myself being very consistent and routine based as well. I prefer my routines and resist change. However, a little birdie in the back of my head is always saying, "Maybe you should look at things, routines, tasks and life from a different angle."

Several years back, I read a few books and articles about mindful meditation just "to broaden my horizons." The concepts in the book really helped me look at life differently and with more of an open mind. I've been a manufacturer's rep (aka Sales Rep) in the furniture industry for the past 36 years. A few years ago I discovered another concept that has really helped me be a better rep and better person. The concept is: Be hungry, humble and curious. As a commissioned sales rep you are instinctively "hungry" – I live in an occupation where you "eat what you kill." If you don't sell product, you don't provide for your family. Being humble is easy – there is always someone better than you at anything and everything. The "curious" part is what I am happy that I have learned/adopted. Rather than get mad at buyer for not buying what I was selling or getting mad at someone for not agreeing with me or not seeing things my way, I have learned to be curious about their decision or stance. Asking myself WHY a person did what they did or say what they said, has helped me better understand that person. Being curious rather than mad takes a different mindset and has made life more enjoyable.

I'm retiring in a few months, and with retirement in mind, I wanted to get back to making things with my hands. For the last couple of years I have been acquiring various woodworking tools and equipment. I've watched hundreds of hours of woodworking videos on YouTube, including most of your videos (keep up the good work). I am learning things all of the time. When I botch a project or make a mistake, I try to be curious rather than mad at myself. What did I do wrong that led to the problem? How can I do a specific task better?

I enjoy your newsletter for a variety of reasons; most of all, your thoughts help me open my mind to other perspectives. Not just with regard to woodworking, but on a mental level as well. I find your insights interesting and enlightening – thank you for taking the time to share your thoughts on issues other than the perfect woodworking technique.

Stay Hungry, Humble, and Curious.

Regards,
Emmett

PS: Attached is a pic of some of the projects I've made as I start my woodworking journey.



Wow! You are so prolific! I love all the various shapes of these. The wine bottle charcuterie board is brilliant. Also, thanks for your ruminations on last month's newsletter. I keep coming back to the word "curious." It really feels like one of the most powerful concepts in life. —Steve

Steve,

I have to say this month's newsletter really hit home with me. I am a mixture of following ingrained habits and freestyle adventures with wood. I have yet to make something without mistakes. Through those mistakes I have learned that wood is so forgiving and challenging all at the same time. I really appreciate your practical common sense approach to woodworking. Thank you!

—Jennie

"Embrace our mistakes" has become a bit of a cliché, but it's so much deeper when we take the time to consider how empowering it is to understand that mistakes are simply part of the creative process. They don't exist as things to overcome, but to grow from. —Steve

Hi Steve,

Don't know if you'll ever read this email—

I just wanted to say that you're quite an inspiration. I could just listen to you talk for hours. You're one of the reasons that pushed me to decide to start my journey of making. I admire your simplicity. You're to the point, reasonable, and not a sell-out. That's enough to mean something to at least a good section of woodworkers and enthusiasts!

Thanks for existing! This is just an appreciation email!

Cheers,
Krishna

Thanks, Krishna! Yes, I actually read all of my messages! I really appreciate you taking the time to write. I'm still trying to come to terms with my role in this space and there are certainly times I wished I had sold out more lol. —Steve

Thoughts on this month's newsletter? Got a story to tell? Just want to say hi? Drop me a line by simply replying to this email.

Member Projects

This month, I wanted to highlight a couple of tables made by course members.

This is the **California Casual Side Table**, the first project in The Weekend Woodworker. The idea behind California Casual (honestly, I think I coined that design style when I designed the course, but probably not) is something unpretentious, simply built, with a few small sophisticated features, such as the beveled tops and “reverse picket” feet. Painting California Casual a super bright color is part of the look. But feel free to break this rule and embrace the natural wood with a clear finish!



California Side Table by Pawel S.

Also, here's a **Mobile Lumber Cart** (from The Weekend Workshop course) built by Lisa. Including a cat in your photo automatically gives you an edge in having your project featured here. 😂



Mobile Lumber Cart by Lisa W.

The **Home Hardware Store** may be the most tedious project in The Weekend Workshop, but it's so rewarding. I love that Steven went the extra mile to add the label frames on each drawer. Well done. This will last a lifetime.



Home Hardware Store by Steven B.

Have you made something you want over a quarter million people to see in next month's newsletter? Just hit reply and send me a pic.

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