

COVER STORY



Bruce and David in the Catskill Mountains: "Mr. Red" and "Mr. Black" (what Bruce and called each other). Image provided by the author.

Plant Pears for your Heirs, a Story of Fruit and Friendship

BY DAVID FRIED

When you plant a tree, it's going to be here for a while. Like an old friend.

I met Bruce Kaufman on the first day of kindergarten. We've been friends ever since. The first time I went to his house, he showed me the pear tree his mother planted in his backyard. The fruit was like nothing I had ever tasted.

As we grew up, we played guitar, singing happily under that pear tree. Bruce would come over to my basement at night for l.n.s. (late-night smokes). My father came looking for us one night. Bruce hid, but my father saw him. I'd also hide when Bruce's parents came home. I climbed out the window once, ending up right under that pear tree.

Bruce got into organic farming early on. He turned our mailman and me on to composting in our back yards in Yonkers. One day, Bruce came with his little green Toyota truck and took me up north, guitar and all.

Bruce became an organic farmer in New Hampshire. He and his friend Bill would visit an ancient pear grove. They made pear sauce on the cookstove for the food coop.

In 1979, I hiked the Long Trail in Vermont. I lived on wild berries, apples, and pears. If I ever had some land, I knew I'd plant fruit trees and berries and have most of what I needed right there.

I settled in Vermont and started Elmore Roots Fruit Tree Nursery. Sometimes it was -43 degrees. Our trees had to be strong. I learned from Lewis Hill, Greg Williams, Bill Mackently, and the trees. Pears are the easiest fruit to grow. People think they can't grow them, so they don't plant them. Pest populations haven't built up. This week, I delivered thousands of frozen pears to Hill Farmstead Brewery. Our pears make great beer.

Customers have led us to promising wild pear trees. We have kept propagating them. We name them after the town where they were growing. The "Waterville", "Chester", "Winooski", and the "Eden" pear are being planted in fields, meadows, and orchards.

Bruce and I were certified organic farmers from the get-go. Bruce worked with Samuel Kaymen, founder of NOFA, at the Rural Education Center. Bruce built their milking room and raised the first cows that became Stonyfield Farm. He was there when Bill Mollison brought permaculture to America. He asked Bill to sit in front of the fireplace because he was a smoker.

Bruce moved to Vermont and farmed with Joey at Littlewood, then at his own Riverside Farm in East Hardwick. When Bruce started his farm, he planted pear trees along the garden. Bruce grew kale, onions, and winter squash as far as the eye could see. He helped start Deep Root Cooperative and delivered his own crops. They were always high quality. (Our guinea pig would eat no other kale besides what Bruce gave him.) Bruce always had young farmers around who learned from his spirit and skills. Often, they went on to start their own farms.

Bruce believed in growing food for the people. He donated loads of vegetables to food pantries, which made him smile. I would bring him pear cider, and we shared stories. He'd lift his glass "to his oldest friend". We talked about being camp counselors, riding inner tubes in the Catskills, and wondered where the girls we missed from high school were now. Bruce would play albums, usually The Dead, but sometimes Mose Allison. "I live the life I love, and I love the life I live" were the lyrics we lived by.

There are bears. There are lairs. There are pears for your heirs.

We got older. Bruce sat in his chair this time when I visited. He had some kind of cancer he was fighting with all he could muster. His angel wife Judy Jarvis was always there with his favorite foods, elixirs, and tonics. I gave him Jin Shin Jyutsu sessions.

Even though we all loved him so much, Bruce died this past July on his farm. We carried him up the hill on a wooden board platform. I was wearing a top hat. When we were fifteen, Bruce and I had each bought a collapsible top hat in a store on Broadway. We both still had ours.

Hundreds of organic farmers came to a celebration of Bruce's life that week. The world is a lot quieter now. Bruce sleeps in his resting place on his farm, looking out at the mountains. His wife told me Bruce asked that two pear trees be planted there. This spring I will bring my two best pears, and they will grow there beside him. They will flower and fruit, and life may be sweeter for this ...

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