

Third-Generation Family Tree Keeps on Giving Rick Orr

Black Locust Senior

I was born and raised near downtown Billings, Montana, where my parents owned their first home from 1935 to 1968. My three brothers and I were raised in that small two-bedroom, one-bathroom home. In the backyard, among many trees, was a black locust, which none of us paid much attention to. It was just part of the yard. The one thing I do recall about the tree was the need to pick up the many seedpods it shed each year, a chore that fell to one of us boys. We would come to name that tree Black Locust Senior.

My father had a shop in the basement of a second house, or cottage, at the rear of our property. The shop contained a variety of tools, including a metal lathe, a homemade wood lathe that Dad built, and other equipment. It was there that all us brothers were exposed to wood-working, turning, and generally getting our hands dirty with all types of jobs.

Black Locust Junior

In 1968, my parents sold the property for commercial development and moved to the west end of Billings. That fall, my father planted one of the seeds from Senior in a small pot and later transplanted it to our new backyard. What possessed my dad to keep some of those locust seeds is something I will never know. The new tree, named Junior, flourished, even after being run over with a lawn mower by my brother Tom.

When Junior was mature, my father again collected seeds from its fallen pods and put them away in a plastic film canister. For some unexplained reason, I ended up with possession of the canister. We sold the house after my parents died in 1987, and my brothers and I moved to various places around the U.S. and the world.

Black Locust III

In 1995, I built a new home in the Denver area. There, I planted one of

Junior's seeds in a small pot and later transplanted the seedling in our new backyard. That tree, known to us as Black Locust III, was planted in 2000. Today, it is about 30' (9m) tall with a 6"-(15cm-) diameter base. The tree has been professionally trimmed and shaped at least twice in these twenty years. In an early effort at trimming the tree myself, I saved some small branches, sealed their ends, and stored them for later use.

While looking for projects during the COVID-19 pandemic, I came across those small branches from Black Locust III. They had been stored for almost five years, so I figured the wood should be dry. I turned a series of small, simple lidded boxes for my siblings and for various grandchildren. In each of the boxes, I put some of the family locust tree seeds. I know my parents would be happy with the boxes made from this third-generation tree. And perhaps its seeds will be planted for yet another family tree to be nurtured into maturity.

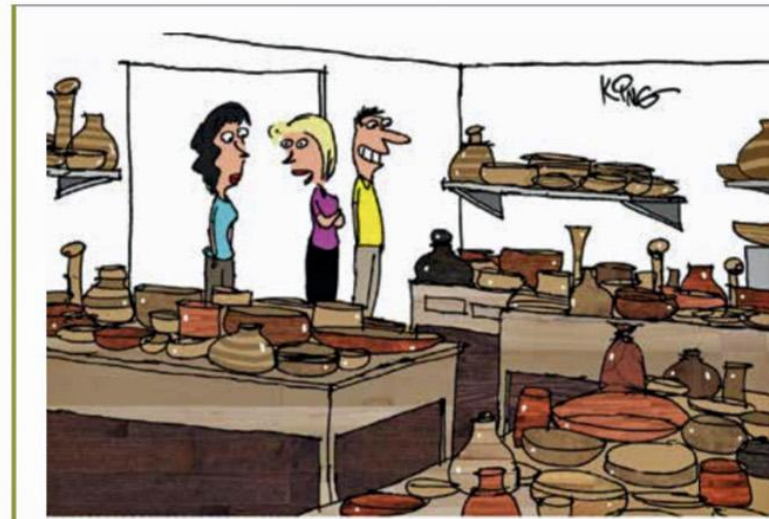
Rick Orr is a past president of the Front Range Woodturners in Denver, Colorado, and a frequent demonstrator at the Rocky Mountain Woodturners Symposium. He lives in the Denver metro area with his wife Lorraine and Black Locust III.



The author stands with Black Locust III, a third-generation family tree.



Family heirloom boxes, turned from trimmings from the multi-generation Orr-family locust tree, contain the seeds for future offspring.



"Woodturning has been a stress-reliever for us."