

EDITOR'S CORNER

A Poem Lovely as a Tree

In China, there is a saying that it takes 10 years to shape a tree but it takes 100 years to shape a person. In other words, to develop true character it takes time, patience and discipline to build a strong human being. People of all nations love trees for their beauty, charm, strength, protection, shade, productivity, utility, and many lovely attributes, so it is unthinkable to have a world without trees.

Manhattan, Kansas is labeled as "Tree City USA." To receive and maintain the title, the city promises to plant 1,000 trees per year within city limits. I did my share and planted a pear tree next to our house twenty years ago. It was a good tree. It grew strong, fast and bore many pears, year after year. Soon it grew taller than our house and soared toward the sky. Many birds and bees visited the tree and many squirrels also found the tree and the pears appetizing. Therein lies the problem. Every spring and autumn the pears will appear and try to mature but the squirrels would come and bite the tip of the young pears, so, off they fell to the ground and were wasted. As the tree grew taller, the pears developed above the roof. In the autumn along with the rain drops we heard constant sounds of dropping pears day and night. As much as I loved the pear tree, I had no choice but to have the tree cut down at the height of its pride and glory. I felt quite sad to see the pear tree go and saved one slice of the tree trunk.

On the surface of this beautiful piece of wooden treasure I inscribed the famous poem, *Trees*, by Joyce Kilmer (1886-1918, who died too young!) and drew a picture of our house with the lovely pear tree towering over the roof:

Trees

I think that I shall never see
A poem lovely as a tree
A tree whose hungry mouth is pressed
Against the Earth's sweet flowing breast
A tree that looks at God all day
And lifts her leafy arms to pray

A tree that may in Summer wear
A nest of Robins in her hair
Upon whose bosom snow has lain
Who intimately lives with rain
Poems are made by fools like me
But only God can make a tree

At 1:55 a.m. July 4, 2004, about a year after the pear tree was gone, my wife and I heard a great sound of something falling from the sky and then saw our lights blinking violently, smelled an electrical fire odor and then, complete darkness in the house. Startled, we found some torch lights and candles and ventured out of the house to investigate what happened. Behold, our 100-year-old, 100-foot-tall Hackberry tree fell completely to the ground sprawling all over our garden and into half of the neighbor's yard, taking along with it all the power lines, telephone lines, TV cables, smaller trees, tomato plants, steel fences, my precious outdoor aquarium, etc. It was like a scene from World War II. Amazingly, no one was hurt and no building was damaged when this once proud, handsome, King of the back yard forest, pride of the neighborhood, Grand Old Tree sadly fell in the darkness of night.

So within one year I saw a lovely pear tree being taken down at its prime and a seasoned tree who battled diseases and old age fall unwillingly. This, I guess is life. We all need to live to the fullest as best as we can as we travel through the journey of our destiny.

I miss both trees dearly. Maybe, I will go out and buy another little tree to support Manhattan, Kansas as "Tree City USA" and plant it at the former site of the 100-year-old tree. Who knows, soon, some robins may build a nest for their babies on my new little tree to start the cycle of life once again.

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