

Exercise and Trees In New Subdivisions: A Cautionary Tale



I guess the longer I live on this earth the more I become aware of interesting analogies. So much in our lives and experience is focused on finding connections and the 'discovery' of those connections can be all at once fascinating, instructive, and *sometimes* even inspiring.

As I have gotten older it has become very obvious to me that good diet and exercise *both* are really increasingly and profoundly essential not only to maintain my health, strength and appearance, but indeed to prevent – or at least *post-pone* – diabolical decrepitude. These days when I am no longer personally climbing a lot of trees, my wife reminds me regularly that I need to make a habit of working out with those abominable weights to prevent the onset of unsightly and degenerative regressions. Okay, I have to agree.

So now *here's* the analogy. In the world of trees, which has been for more than three decades now my chosen 'profession', the same is true. Of course, when we start to think along these lines one part of it becomes instantly obvious. We quickly can see and can legitimately compare good microbial organic soil composition, availability of necessary mineral catalysts (natural fertilizers), proper water application and so on as *all* being analogous to a healthy diet. But where does the *exercise* part come in? Follow me here.

At least until recently when the housing market has seemed to tank, new subdivisions *had been* popping up all over the place and land values were at a premium. Conse-

quently, almost all of us have been observers of poorly planned and wrongly motivated development that too often can only euphemistically be termed 'progress'. It has been common to see wholesale "*falling-and-hauling*" of entire stands of old trees in order to open more ground for 'development'.

ever these scrawny skeletons are, initially at least, still useful as good marketers, for they conveniently provide a flimsy excuse to advertise a recently raped parcel of dirt as a "treed lot" and by some weird extension of that same

reasoning provide a perverted rational for ludicrous street and/or development namings like 'Forest Lane', 'Shady Glade' or maybe 'Shadow Woods.' (see footnote)

But there's more. These frequently pathetic and solitary 'designated survivors' were once upon a time happily and successfully existing in the middle of some natural and undisturbed wooded area. There



But on the other hand it seems almost ironic that any old tree will sell. So entire new neighborhoods of houses now snuggle up tightly against little narrow token rows of towering pole-like *survivor trees*, standing like forlorn bedraggled derelicts along the property lines of tiny lots or towering above the rooflines only two feet off a foundation. These survivors usually have no lateral branching and may have been retained only grudgingly, yet in the process betraying their retainers as grotesque and almost cruel reminders that a natural wooded area once *actually did* exist on that spot. How-

they grew up protected from the forces of wind by their formerly-surrounding-but-now-gone-brothers. Also because they had to grow up tall and straight to compete with those brothers for light, they neither had room to develop *nor needed to develop* a typical system of lateral branching that provides not only natural characteristic beauty but important stability in the same way a circus high wire walker's balance pole provides stability. There

in the middle these weaker ones had no need of such . . . until . . .

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So it is then legitimate, by analogy, to say that those inside the historic protective circle, whose once singular role was only as a part of a larger whole, never exercised. They never did because they never had to. But there is a term you may have heard: "Use it or lose it." These survivors were never on the outside, flexing and waving their arms to withstand the storms and unforgiving winds of their early days. Instead they lived an easier life inside and 'lost it'. But now . . . now their outside protectors are gone and they are, for the first time, all alone and crammed up against the back or the side of some unsuspecting new residence in a too-small and non-viable artificial space. And for the first time in their lives they are now exposed to those winds and forces of nature never before an issue for them. Further, they are exposed to these new forces entirely without their "balance poles", and entirely without the over-time development of cellular *tension and compression wood* (a product of "exercise") that would have made them strong and resilient, and typically and largely without very much of their former anchoring and nurturing root systems.

Well, I doubt that I need to continue belaboring this little cautionary tale? I think the point is made. Yet several conclusions might be drawn, one of which could be that it may be even better – and safer – just to knock everything down . . . *everything*, and scrape the ground clean rather than leave these ridiculous, damaged, and risk-prone token stragglers that have hardly enough canopy to even provide a little worthwhile shade. And I suppose that when operating under a maximum lot count and maximum profit philosophy, that may very well, again ironically, be the least damaging and most enticing way to go.

However, although it is unfortunately far less palatable to many profit-fixated developers and builders (*and there are good exceptions to that group because I know a few*), there is *another better option* when mature trees are present. It requires thoughtful and strategic subdividing that mandates fewer and larger lots for a given overall tract size. It requires more strategically located greenbelt

spaces. It requires interest in looking at innovative options for installing infrastructure and an insistence on adequate and enforceable tree protection zones. Taken together, the net effect of all of this will be long term improved tree survival rates, enhanced property appearance and values, far more precious summertime shady living space, and an elevated pride of ownership and quality of life.

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My father used to tell me that *'there's a right way and a wrong way to do anything'*. Frequently the quickest way and

maybe the most immediately profitable way is not the right way in the long view. And there is almost always an additional price to pay for doing it wrong, a price that in cases like this the new homeowner and the entire community is often left to pay.

Footnote: Street names offered above are fabricated for illustrative purposes only. Any correspondence to actual geographic locations is accidental and unintended. . . does that let me off?)



From My Journal: Avoiding "Forever Regretful"



These last few months of what we can probably refer to historically now as the Fall of 2007, have been for me a time of exciting and unique opportunities. I've mentioned the fact before in this space that for both my wife and I travel has always been, and still is for us, like *Christmas to a twelve-year-old*. And in that regard my unusually jammed itinerary since about the end of this past summer has been both full and very exceptional.

In fact, it's been so full that I was only *half-joking* when the other day I said to my secretary . . . my right arm . . . that I had recently been waking at night fighting off the notion that I might be sliding into old age irresponsibility. My father had always been one who believed in "keeping your nose to the wheel and staying with a job. While I surely agree with that in principle, I have simultaneously seemed to have and I think still do have a bit of trouble with it, in particular when it

comes in conflict with our love of travel and the perennially special thrill of packing a bag.

But in addition to "full", I also used the word "exceptional" a minute ago. I now have framed on my office wall a formal invitation that came to me almost serendipitously, simply by virtue of the happenstance of being in the right place at the right time about forty-three years ago. And it turned out to be a very special invitation for far more folks than just me. Forty-three years ago I was a plebe in the Brigade of Midshipmen at the U. S. Naval Academy, class of 1968. There I was placed in a military company with another new young Midshipman Fourth class by the name of Michael G. Mullen. So the invitation now on my office wall is one that when first received, my wife very sagely remarked that I had to accept and go or I'd be "forever regretful." It was from the Office of the Secretary of De-

fense, inviting me to attend the Change of Command ceremonies for General Peter Pace, the outgoing Chairman, and Admiral Michael Mullen as he (Mike) took over the duties as the new seventeenth Chairman of the Joint Chiefs. I did go. And as you might expect, it was indeed a uniquely wonderful experience in at least a dozen ways, not the least of which was the opportunity to reunite with old friends and classmates. Some whom I had not seen for four decades.

My wife is a gifted speaker and teacher. Fast on the heels of my return from Washington, she was herself scheduled to leave on a speaking tour in Kenya with a small group of women from our church. At the same time our youngest daughter Rebekah has moved with her husband to Johannesburg, South Africa. Neither Becky nor I had ever previously

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been to Africa, so now the . . . may I use that word again? . . . the *serendipitous* coincidence seemed too great, virtually mandating that I too book a flight to



Johannesburg to visit with Matt and Bekah. I had to wonder, at age 63, how many more chances I could expect to get to visit that equatorial continent and see my daughter and their home there in the process? So once again, not wanting to be “forever regretful”, I booked it. I flew to Africa and it was a fantastic trip. While there we took a four day side trip down to Capetown . There I stood on the shore, watching the waves crash against the rocks along the Cape of Good Hope and stared southward out to sea toward Antarctica. Wow!

November 11th every year is Veterans Day. Since the end of WWII it has replaced Armistice Day, which formerly commemorated the ending of WWI on our national calendar. Today Veterans Day is, I’m afraid, a *holiday* (originally read “holy day”) that for many of the younger generations has become little more than just another day off from work. Even fewer people know that the day before that every year is November 10th, the birthday of the Marine Corps. This past year the Corps was 232 years old, a year older than the country itself. For Marines all over the world, that celebration of their birthday every year is a *very big deal*. This year it was also the third annual occasion for the

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have written of the amazing rediscovered bonding within that special group. We enjoyed it again this past November in Austin, Texas. This year there were sixteen of us present. A reporter for a local Austin weekly newspaper, an old Marine himself, came by to visit with us and ended up staying two days. In his later newspaper column he commented that “. . . the one thing these guys seem to have in common is a great affection for each other and . . . although they (since) went in different directions, (they) stayed loyal to each other and to the Corps.”

I was only barely back from Texas when my wife and I were talking about the especially bright fall colors in the foliage this year. Very quickly I was infected with her itch to go to the Smokies to revel in that color. It was just to be a fast weekend trip. You know, *Thursday* through Sunday. So we did. Among other places, we rode our bicycles one more time around Cades Cove. We luxuriated in the colors, the invigorating late fall air and the visual delight of multitudes of deer grazing on that high valley floor that once was the home to a hardy breed of nineteenth century mountain folk. We made a lot of

reuniting of my old and formerly disconnected buddies and brothers who as long ago enlisted Marines found our selves together in a prep school run by the Department of the Navy to academically prepare us to enter that Academy class of ’68. In a previous edition of this letter I

photos and I did a pencil drawing for my journal. We walked through the restored historic sites there in the valley and appreciated again how rural Americans used to live in a way that forged steel into their characters.

After celebrating Thanksgiving here at home with the family, I was off again to Nashville for the annual conference of the American Society of Consulting Arborists. A previous issue has commented on that group as well. I never miss it.

We were home with the kids for Christmas. Even Matt and Bekah flew in from Africa to be here. But for some time now there have been whispers, rumors of a necessary late February “anti-winter-depression trip” to Key West. That’s another favorite place! “We can rent bikes or scooters down there,” she said. “Just like before.” Well, how can you argue with that sort of logic? Anyway, I know my bags are not yet so threadbare that

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they will not stand a few more packings. Years ago, when our three girls were young(er) and still with us here at home, we more than once busted our budget and on at least one memorable occasion borrowed *a bit more than a bit* to make a family trip that we really, financially speaking, could not at the time afford. But each time we recovered somehow and now we view that extravagant habit as something we could not afford *not* to do. And we’d do it over again . . . in a blink! Absolutely! How do they say it in that ad? EuroRail pass through Europe, \$600. Bareboat sailing in the Caribbean, \$6,000. The memories and stories, Priceless! Sure don’t want to end up “forever regretful.”

Another Winter Oak Gall Reminder

Over the three years that I have been producing this newsletter, I have more than once mentioned the exciting new control we can now get with oak gall, that knotty tumorous growth that plagues both the vitality and the appearance of our large oaks. Previous editions have gone into some detail with both how this gall forms and the procedure now available to reverse this undesirable, debilitating and disfiguring phenomenon.

Aesthetics aside, maybe a more serious objection to this gall issue is its increasing interference with sap movement (water and sugar) through the tree, thereby retarding vitality and elevating susceptibility to additional problems.

January and February is the optimum time to administer this treatment. If you have been watching these knotty malformations form on the branches and twigs of your oak(s), call us. We can help.





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It occurred to me that the Edgar Guest poem entitled "Home" that I inserted into the last issue of this newsletter might be misinterpreted . . . or maybe a more accurate word would be *un-interpreted, or uninterpretable* . . . by many today that have sadly but inevitably acclimatized to a society and lifestyle that is largely urban, fast, busy, computerized, transient and marketing-driven. It occurred to me that to such a person, in such a society, this archaic old piece of sentimental drivel might be just so much silly nonsense. But for some reason I am drawn to it still, even as decades ago I memorized it without ever really intending to do so or knowing just exactly when I did it. Same thing with the old Rudyard Kipling poem "If." One day I woke up and just knew them both by heart, without any conscious effort beyond repeated readings. I really don't know how I did that except that I'd always loved them since the day long ago that my father first recited part of "If" to me in his woodshop as he was turning a chair leg on a lathe. And I still do love them. Maybe now even more than ever and maybe *because*, rather than in spite of the fact that both of them seem now out of step, a bit strange and even alien by the popular and dominant standards of many today. Somehow they both, in their own ways, still speak to me about something that seems now largely lost to us. And that loss brings along with it its own form of ineffable diminishment.



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So here, maybe as much for me again as for anyone else, is that *other* poem. It's a bit more well known and hearsay is that many of us (but not me) were required to learn it in English class.



If
Rudyard Kipling

If you can keep your head when all about you
 Are losing theirs and blaming it on you;
 If you can trust yourself when all men doubt you,
 But make allowance for their doubting too:
 If you can wait and not be tired by waiting,
 Or being lied about, don't deal in lies,
 Or being hated, don't give way to hating,
 And yet don't look too good, nor talk too wise;

If you can dream – and not make dreams your master;
 If you can think – and not make thoughts you aim,
 If you can meet with Triumph and Disaster
 And treat those two impostors just the same:
 If you can bear to hear the truth you've spoken
 Twisted by knaves to make a trap for fools,

Or watch the things you gave your life to, broken,
 And stoop and build them up with worn-out tools;

If you can make one heap of all your winnings
 And risk it on one turn of pitch-and-toss,
 And lose, and start again at your beginnings,
 And never breathe a word about your loss:
 If you can force your heart and nerve and sinew
 To serve your turn long after they are gone,
 And so hold on when there is nothing in you
 Except the Will which says to them: "Hold on!"

If you can talk with crowds and keep your virtue,
 Or walk with Kings – nor lose the common touch,
 If neither foes nor loving friends can hurt you,
 If all men count with you, but none too much:
 If you can fill the unforgiving minute
 With sixty seconds worth of distance run,
 Yours is the Earth and everything that's in it,
 And – which is more – you'll be a Man, my son!

