

Going Out on a Limb

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The house we moved into Thanksgiving weekend of my junior year had a beautiful Colorado blue spruce in the front yard. As it grew, it blocked late afternoon sun from the family room. Years after my parents passed, I drove by the house in Illinois, I knew something was wrong...they had cut down that beautiful tree.

After packers worked the day before, boxes were stacked all over the house and the basement. Then came the wind and rain. The basement had water, soaking the packed boxes; the travel trailer had been tilted enough the chucks moved from around the tires; a mover's foot came through the ceiling of the garage while emptying the garage attic AND the small weeping willow tree blew over.

In a rental home I had, there was a crab apple tree in the front yard. Fruit littered the ground. I heard a leaf rake in the yard. When I went to investigate, I found my neighbor raking the apples back into my yard with less than a happy face.

Our first house had no grass, trees or landscaping when we moved into the brand new neighborhood. A cousin offered a small tree if we'd come dig it up, transport and plant it. The boys and I headed to the southern suburbs of Chicago along the toll road. It was one of those "Are we there yet?" kind of trips for two little boys. Lois and I got it dug up and placed in a black trash bag with bare roots. We got stuck in traffic on the way home and the car began to overheat resulting in AC off and windows open on a very hot afternoon. The leaves on the tree were very wilted when we got home. Once home, I set about planting the sickly tree.

That night I talked to my dad and he asked how big the root ball was on the tree. Root Ball? I told him the roots were bare. "What?" came his shout along with an explanation that the tree had no chance of survival. A few weeks later he and mother came to visit along with a tree with a "proper" root ball attached. He proceeded to plant it. Some 20 years later I visited that town and house. Much to my joy both my tree and dad's tree were mature trees and had survived their completely different planting techniques.

The big tree in the front yard in Castle Rock shaded a large portion of the grass resulting in poor grass. A nursery friend installed a beautiful shade garden with appropriate plants and mulch. When leaves dropped – and there were many – I reversed the Shop-Vac and blew the leaves out of the garden. The year after moving to WG, I drove some neighbors by the house to show them "my" shade garden. There in the middle of the garden were two Adirondack chairs in the space and no garden.

Lesson learned: don't go out on a limb and revisit those trees in person, remember them in your heart and mind.