

Favorite trees in my life

By Barry Schrader, senior columnist, Daily Chronicle, Nov. 18, 2017

Those of us fortunate enough to grow up in the country or in a home with trees around might have had a treehouse or favorite tree where we could shinny up and sit in the lower crotch.

I had such a tree out on Baseline Road behind our house in Doc Corson's pasture south of Genoa. It was a giant oak with branches that spread for hundreds of feet. Squirrel and bird nests could be seen in its branches. Doc's draft horses sought its shade on simmering summer days.

My father, Vernon, nailed some slats on the backside of the tree so I could climb up to the lowest branch to enjoy the panoramic view. This included the Kishwaukee River, which ran near our home.

Now a half-century later, I have found another favorite tree to enjoy, this one in a pasture at the corner of Lovell and Quigley roads south of Sycamore. But a "No Trespassing" sign and four horses grazing nearby didn't allow me to get close to it. However, every time I drive by, I am struck by its longevity and think of all the storms it has survived.

Contacting Al Roloff, DeKalb County Forest Preserve District natural resources manager, I learned it is a Bur Oak, very common to these parts. Although I "guesstimated" it must be at least 200 years old, he said you would have to measure the circumference of the trunk or bore into it to determine the age. Surmising it might have begun from an acorn dropped there by a passing bird in 1818, it could be a bicentennial tree for Illinois' 200th year celebration.

One can even fantasize that Chief Shabbona and his band of Potawatomis might have passed by that tree, pausing to rest in its shade and collect some acorns for sustenance later.

Now getting back to Roloff, he said, "I don't recall having a favorite tree as a child, but I sure did like the fruit on the Mulberry trees that grew in the local park. I marveled at all the 'cotton' that would blow off the Cottonwood tree in my grandmother's yard. I loved the aroma of the flowers on the old Catalpa tree in my parents' yard. I couldn't wait for the pears to ripen on the tree behind my uncle Herman's house. I took great joy in hours spent cracking the hickory and walnuts from under the trees on uncle Fred's farm. My friends and I strengthened our scrawny arms climbing from the low-

hanging branches to near the top of the Sugar Maple in our neighbor's yard
... .”

Speaking of giant oaks, I visited probably the oldest one in DeKalb this week in the 200 block of Rolfe Road. It has a plaque at the base stating “City of DeKalb Historic Tree Award In Honor of Dr. James C. and Dorothy S. Ellis, 1998.” They were the original owners of that property. Today's owner told me that the city looks after it, even installing cables in its branches to prevent them from breaking under their own weight. An earlier giant Oak on Prospect Street near First Street died a few years ago and had to be taken down. Roger Keys was lucky enough to get a portion of the tree which he said could be 300 or more years old. A cross-section of it can now be seen in front of the Glidden Homestead barn.

Some tree stories aren't as pleasant. When I was in fourth grade in Waterman, my cousin Joel Thompson and I ventured north on Route 23 from his home in the old Waterman Airport tower building. We stopped at a grove of Catalpa trees near a branch of the Somonauk Creek (on land now owned by twins Craig and Curt Rice). Joel, being the daring one, decided to climb up one of the trees, and fell on his head to the ground. A big gash bled profusely and I could only help with a handkerchief. He could still walk so we hurried back to the house where his mother Evelyn Thompson rushed him to the doctor (may have been Doc Purdy, but I can't say for sure). I wonder if Joel recalls that incident. His career was spent in the US Navy and he now lives somewhere in the San Diego area, according to our cousin Audrey Cooper.

There are other trees I have admired, like the Banyan tree whose branches cover a whole block in Lahaina, Hawaii, planted in 1873, or the giants in Mariposa Grove in Yosemite National Park, or in Muir Woods north of San Francisco. I have been fortunate to commune with them up close and personal.

I will close with a few snippets of a Joyce Kilmer poem that we had to memorize in a junior high English class taught by Audrey Soli in Genoa:

“I think that I shall never see
A poem as lovely as a tree ...
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 ...”

and so on (only my old classmate Janice (Gerlt) Campbell can probably still recite it).

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PHOTO CUTLINES

This towering old Bur Oak stands like a sentinel near the corner of Lovell and Quigley roads south of Sycamore.



[Larger view of Tree](#)

Second photo shows the even larger and older Oak in the 200 block of Rolfe Road, DeKalb. (Schrader photos for Shaw Media)



[Larger view of Tree](#)