

Our Hill Country trees, such treasures

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In surveying my own life journey through the decades, it is clear that a very early fascination with and appreciation for trees developed.

My earliest connection remains a cluster of Gulf coastal oaks. They provided playscapes and meditation that nurtured my spirit and imagination. Perhaps you have a similar special place you go to in your personal memory bank. As our childhood habitat expanded it grew to include two historic public parks in uptown New Orleans where play and inquisitive discovery were nearly endless.

Later in life as visitors, our children and grandchildren have had their turns at developing adventurous explorations and memories among moss draped live oaks.

The valuing of trees that was rooted in my early life experiences has prompted attention at every turn to the gifts of trees in our contexts for living and exploring. One dramatic moment comes to mind when our older son came home from his nearby high school on lunch break. A creek bed that wound around our home was being deepened and widened for drainage purposes in an overdeveloped area. A huge handsome sycamore was marked for removal. Lunch break was over and I approached inquiring about whether our son had lost track of time.

Alas, I found tears! His fist came down on the table as he declared he wasn't returning to school but "going out there to climb that tree so they can't destroy it and cut it into pieces!"

Oh, my! Before he could be calmed it took some reasoning and work with my own feelings about engineering and political plans with little or no regard to grand trees and their value.

Fast forward to note a personal support of our late life domicile in an oak motte in Comal County.

Yes, it presents some constant challenges and demands but mostly provides shade, pleasure and a fascinating habitat for the winged and wild neighbors we know currently in greater intimacy with 2020-2021 quarantine life. It is my great personal physical, emotional and spiritual good fortune to twice or more each day go on our lane through two wooded strips between our “haus” and the county road where mail, papers, packages and more are delivered.

When I need a break a bench, hammock or convenient low branch offers a place to reflect and restore. Along the ranch’s creeks is an array of life in abundance. Heritage oaks send the imagination into soaring zones of reflection and quieting. What a gift of our Hill Country life!

We can drive in any direction here in Comal and neighboring counties to see the implications of being a top growth community in the USA.

Even more telling is any drive on our interstate corridors (I-35 and I-10) or other major thoroughfares where so many acres are being opened for development. Too frequently one notes that Hill Country trees to be removed to expand access and improve mobility with little or no thought for mitigation. Indeed, just like our son had to understand that flood control measures when well planned serve an important purpose, so, too, pathways for transit can be important. One just hopes the planning is “smart” and cognizant that grand Hill Country trees do not grow in a few days but require decades.

As so much acreage is repurposed for home sites and supporting services in the Hill Country, we have to plead for diligent responsible planning. Some of that begs for setting aside parcels of value to future generations. A growing number of neighbors and colleagues share commitment and passion about Comal’s land, water and wildlife. They make for wonderful new friends and collaborators. Join the conversation about our Comal County Hill Country stewardship as we go forward at ComalConservation.org. It’s a worthy conversation with much discovery ahead!