

An Ode to Oaks

On the 17th of March, just one year ago, we returned from our morning swim at Barton Springs to the sound of chain saws cutting through the quiet of our neighborhood. Across from our Travis Heights bungalow, a team of men was deep into the work of clearing the property of each and every tree. While we knew the house and lot had been sold, we stood with gaping jaws transfixed by this level of destruction.

Neighbors gathered, and we attempted to console one another each other with reassurances that surely the giant oak, protected by city ordinances, and would remain. This historic oak, majestically filled the view from our living room, shared its root system with our neighborhood fox and often, at sunset, provided a resting place for a barred owl or two. We watched and waited as the day went on and just as we were certain the job was complete the foreman climbed the oak, and its branches began to drop.

My grief was shared equally by my husband Joachim and neighbors, but there was something more I felt. It was pity. I experienced a profound ache for those who have never loved a tree, who had no sense of respect for their role on our planet. That tree, well over a century old, had stood tall and strong before the new owner of the property was even conceived. It had withstood countless phases of development and had been carefully preserved when the neighborhood was first established in the early 1930s. And yet now because homes that fill the lot are the trend, and indoor square footage is of more value than all the qualities of a tree, they are being removed from neighborhoods en masse. I don't know about you but I happen to value hundred-year-old trees. Actually, I value all trees.

It was the downing of this great Live Oak that served as a final push for us to leave our rapidly transforming corner of

Austin. And it should come as no surprise we found the perfect lot full of trees, and a builder that designs around them. Today my office window looks out on this beauty. Each weekday I have the honor of watching its silhouette come into focus as dawn breaks. I know it holds many lessons for me in its stillness and strength. If I were a poet, I would construct an ode to my new oak, but alas I am not. However, I am privileged to know about this gift of words left behind for all to enjoy by the late Mary Oliver.

When I am Among the Trees

When I am among the trees,
especially the willows and the honey locust,
equally the beech, the oaks and the pines,
they give off such hints of gladness.
I would almost say that they save me, and daily.

I am so distant from the hope of myself,
in which I have goodness, and discernment,
and never hurry through the world
but walk slowly, and bow often.

Around me the trees stir in their leaves
and call out, "Stay awhile."
The light flows from their branches.

And they call again, "It's simple," they say,
"and you too have come
into the world to do this, to go easy, to be filled
with light, and to shine."

– Mary Oliver –

Be sure to follow me [@LaurenHubele](#) on Instagram for updates.