

JAN 02 2019

Silver Maple

Town of Bristol

Our Silver Maple tree was cut down. We didn't want to cut it down. It wasn't dying. The choice, however, was taken out of our hands because this particular tree was growing in that thin strip of grass between sidewalk and street. That land you have to mow but the town controls.

The Silver Maple was old. At least 80 years old according to the memories of my father, who remembers it being there quite big, when he was a child. I can only tell you about its last 35 years, the time I spent with it.

I remember it as always being huge, too big to wrap my arms around. It had large patches of peeling bark covered in green lichen that we would collect to make fairy houses. Its green leaves had silvery backs that made the leaves look shiny when they rustled in the wind. It was hard to mow around because it was up on a little hummock.

When I was a kid we would lose badminton birdies in its canopy. Our solution of course was to throw the rackets up into the branches to dislodge it. Sometimes the rackets got stuck, and more rackets were employed.

When our cat was young it once got stuck up in the tree. We weren't sure why it had climbed up there, a good ten feet off the ground. Perhaps a dog had chased it up the tree. Our dad got a ladder and climbed up to get the cat out of the tree. It never did that again.

Over time a few branches died. After heavy windstorms there would always be some branches littering the lawn under the tree. But every year in the spring it would be renewed, a huge green canopy.

Its roots slowly rose in the lawn, causing more stubbed bare feet in summer and making mowing more difficult. And the sidewalk slowly rose as the roots grew under it, making either an awesome bike jump, or a tripping hazard, depending on your position. It was that way for years and years. All my life.

Then the town decided to replace the sidewalks. They did not see the uneven cement as an

awesome bike jump. They decided the tree had to go. A smooth sidewalk was more important.

I came home for lunch one day in September to see my majestic old friend lying in pieces, being cut down. The harsh sounds of a chainsaw filled the air. Men in carharts were chipping branches or moving logs and one man, suspended by ropes in the air, cut. I couldn't watch.

They got rid of the branches but left the logs, stacked up in a pile by the road. Passers-by commented. They wondered why- it looked healthy. They commiserated.

We saved a few of the logs- a project for later. And then the rest were taken by a neighbor and the stump was ground and the tree was completely gone; just an empty space left. They put the new sidewalk in.

It has been several weeks, but I still see an empty space every time I look at where the tree used to be. It still takes me by surprise when I come around the corner or look out the window, expecting to see green leaves and instead see the neighbor's houses.

My daughter declared this had been her favorite tree. She made a RIP sign for it. She shed tears for it. Even the prospect of a replacement tree held no appeal.

I wonder if the loss of the tree affects me so much because I like old things. I like record players and wooden windows. I like reading real books and writing with pencil on paper. Perhaps it is just nostalgia- a link to my childhood. Or maybe I just like trees better than cement.

Perfectly smooth, wide sidewalks are great, but what really makes a walk on a summer's day pleasant? Big old shade trees. They are what make old towns walkable and gives them their character. If we continue to cut down all the big old trees to the benefit of our sidewalks, we will not increase the walkability of our town.

I continue to receive condolences for the tree. Flowers, thoughts, leaf tracings. I have not received a single compliment on how nice and flat the new sidewalk is.

Clara Corbin