

*By Wayne Halm*

**F**or years I worked downtown and lived in the suburbs. An eleven mile commute each way, not bad by some people's standards. Driving to and from work was actually quite pleasant, it provided twenty minutes for shifting roles in each direction.

The trips were made more pleasant by a piece of land beside the road. The land was primarily a pasture but it also contained 23 large Oak trees. The trees were the old massive southern kind. Some limbs were so huge that they drooped back to the ground before bouncing skyward again. Giant mounds of green, they appeared on cold brown winter days - busy bird resorts, on summer days. Gray Spanish Moss swayed in the breeze among the branches. One time I saw three Whitetail Deer browsing under one, at another time I wrote a poem about them. The pasture and the trees provided a couple of minutes of peace between the hectic office and the frantic house, they kept alive a vision of a simpler, calmer, more pleasant life - the way it should be.

You may have noticed that the description above is written in the past tense - there is a reason for that. One day a sign appeared in the pasture, it wasn't a big sign, but it was an important sign, it was a "For Sale" sign. A couple of months later a bulldozer knocked the sign down - and the trees. The pasture was paved and I had a Shopping Mall to look at. Like most of my neighbors, I rarely went into the mall and it eventually closed, then I had an abandoned building and weeds to look at. Last year someone bought the place and demolished the mall, then for some reason gave up on whatever plans they had. Now I get an unobstructed view of a mountain of building debris.

If I have written this well it's a sad story, a tale of something lost. I miss the Oak trees. But I'm not complaining, I have no right to complain, I saw the sign, I could have

bought the land, I could have saved the trees - but I didn't. I was enjoying someone else's trees, in a way stealing benefit and not paying for it.

The people who built the Shopping Mall, and the people who tore it down, were not "bad" people. They had a dream, a vision of something they thought was better. That it didn't work out, that it didn't include 23 Oak trees, that it was different from mine, well that's all unfortunate. But they had a dream.

I've come to realize that everyone has dreams. Many I think are foolish, but if I expect people to give up their dreams so I can enjoy something that I'm not paying for, then I am the fool. The people and governments that own and control the rain forests of the world have dreams too. They dream of things being better for them and their children, of things being better in their part of the world. Eventually the rain forests are going to look like Ohio.

So what can a tree hugger do to protect his or her dream? Start by facing the fact that whining isn't working. Getting together and testing the skills of various police departments by day, then testing the skills of various partners by night, may be fun but it really doesn't accomplish very much. It's time to take some "real action".

Contrary to what the people in the White House keep saying, "real action" doesn't necessarily require dropping bombs on anyone. Real action simply means taking concrete steps to get what you want. If you honestly believe that the world needs trees, go out and buy some - then put a fence around them. Get ownership of some, then protect them. There must be a real estate agent somewhere who will sell each of us a few acres of rain forest. If you can't quite bring yourself to trust those foreign people, try buying in Louisiana. Then you can sit back with satisfaction knowing that the trees are safe, that they are there soaking up CO<sub>2</sub> and providing habitat for wildlife.

Wayne's View:

## Saving the Trees

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Now if buying some woodlands is too big of a step for you given the current state of the economy, try planting a few of trees. Just go out in the yard and plant a couple, actually all you may have to do is stop cutting them out of the fence line. Pick the kind that you like, or don't worry about that part, they all soak up CO<sub>2</sub> and the wildlife seems fairly flexible.

Right now, literally right now, I can hear excited squeals and giggles coming through my home office window. I'll discretely look out in a few minutes but I already know what I'll see. There is a fair sized Pecan tree in the front yard, it's way too close to the house, some neighbors disapprove of the leaves, and the utility companies complain about the limbs, but I wouldn't dream of cutting it. Not because it's soaking up CO<sub>2</sub> or because it's providing a playground for half dozen squirrels, but because I know what's going on out there right now. The individuals change but the basic scene has been the same for years. When I look I will see an old woman teaching an excited child of 3 or 4 how to find pecans among the grass and leaves. Perhaps as I watch the woman will see me and give an apologetic smile, if so I will look at the child for a few seconds and return an approving smile to her - then for a while we will both listen to the excited squeals and giggles. It's the way it should be.

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