

Giving thanks for trees I have loved

For a number of years we have spent the Thanksgiving holiday at my daughter's hundred-year-old home near downtown Atlanta.

The kitchen has glass walls on two sides surrounded by a dogwood twice as big as any other I've seen and a tulip poplar that crests above their three-story house. Because the house is situated on a hill, the kitchen feels as if it is suspended in the air in the midst of a rainforest. Until now.

First, the dogwood died from old age. Then lightning took out the poplar. Instead of drinking morning coffee nestled in a tree-house, we will have a view of the street. We will sit exposed, perhaps with a touch of the vertigo I experience in Atlanta's rooftop restaurants or glass-front elevators. I know I will mourn that dogwood and poplar this Thanksgiving.

My daughter is planting new trees, but you can't easily replace a tree like that poplar. Two men extending their arms couldn't span its girth.

Even though it's been three years, my husband and I still mourn the loss of an old laurel oak in our front yard. When we had it removed, the neighbors missed it too. Dozens stopped by to ask why, and I felt guilty for taking it out, even though it was hollow and regularly dropping limbs. It had reached the end of a typical life span for the species, but the neighbors' concern reminded me trees belong to the whole community.

We replaced the oak with three river birches and planted a live oak on the other end of the property. Thanks to Leon County's free tree program, we also have new Florida red maples, ironwoods, and a Grandfather Graybeard. But it will be decades before any of them acquire the stature of that oak.

I also feel the absence of the trees demolished on Mahan because of road construction. Several times I even missed my turn-off because the character of the road so completely changed it didn't look like the way home anymore.

When I was younger, I never saw myself as a tree-hugger. But now I sympathize with those in Los Robles who don't want their oaks to come down, even while I understand some need to be removed for safety's sake. Like our laurel oak.

I give thanks for all the trees I have loved, especially the grand live oaks in downtown Tallahassee. Their beauty was a major factor in our decision to relocate here over 25 years ago. This Thanksgiving I am going to eat breakfast in my daughter's kitchen, happy to be with family, yet missing those ancient trees, which were part of our family too.