

To the planter of trees

By [Beth Merrill Neel](#)

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Two of my frequent routes include an arcade of trees. One is at an intersection I drive by every day, the other on 99E heading south towards Milwaukie, Oregon. Neither is very long—one just a block, the other maybe a quarter-mile. But even when the branches are bare, the trees form this graceful archway that we drive through.

As I went through one the other day, I started wondering about the person or persons who planted those trees. Were they young? Did they see the fruits of their labor? Did they measure carefully the space between the trees, imagining how far apart they needed to be so their branches could grow without touching? Did they plant them hoping that in 80 years, 100 years, the trees would still be alive, healthy, providing a bower for motorists?

It seems to me that planting trees is a pretty selfless act. You may get to watch a sapling get strong, but you will likely not live to see it in its prime. And planting trees is an act of hope, too—hope that someone else will take up the care of the tree, that in the future when the planter is gone someone will look at the tree and offer thanks.

We have two enormous oak trees on the west side of our house. I imagine they were planted when the house was built in 1925. They are now two-and-a-half times as tall as our house, and they are beautiful, whether with bared branches or in the lush fullness of summer. They are beautiful and more often than not I do not appreciate them. They are usually dropping something. In spring it is helicopter seed pods, then green acorns in the summer. In the fall the brown acorns drop, aided by feuding squirrels. Once the acorns are done, the leaves turn brown and drift down; we are very generous and share our leaves with the neighborhood. In the chill of winter things are still unless there's a wind storm, in which case we have branches adorning our yard and roof.

I wish I appreciated our two oaks more than I do. They provide habitat for squirrels, and I think the crows are doing their own version of *Laugh-In* in them. They shade

half the house, a relief in the relentless sun of summer. But they are messy, and trimming them is not cheap. Their root system means that we have a basement in only half the house.

Would I cut them down if I could? That's the question, isn't it. It would make our lives and landscaping easier. We wouldn't have to wear our bike helmets when we dine al fresco.

Would I cut them down if I could? No. No, I wouldn't. They are things of beauty, among the most grand in the neighborhood. The crows make me laugh. The squirrels drive the dog nuts and give him something to do when we're gone for the day. The shade is lovely.

And there's something plain wrong about cutting down a magnificent healthy tree—the inconvenience to us is far outweighed by the patience it took for that tree to grow, the hearty conversations with neighbors in the fall when we're all raking the leaves, the sheer beauty of something that towers over our man-made home.

So, to the planter of trees, our oaks, the trees that line the avenues: thank you. Thank you for your foresight. Thank you for your dream. Thank you for your part in creating something beautiful that maybe you never saw. Thank you for the trees.

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