The Plant Doctor's LANDSCAPE TIPS

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MISCELLANEOUS HOLIDAY RAMBLINGS FROM THE PLANT DOCTOR

INTRODUCTION

It's that time of year again when we're heading into the Holiday Season to close out the year 2019 C.E. Traditional at this time of year, at least for some of those years in the past, I have written articles of a personal nature, for example, relating my experiences when growing up on the family farm in central Ohio and my reminiscences of my family and how those memories guided me and helped to shape my life.

I often receive more compliments about my personal articles than I do from my scientific and semi-scientific articles. So here it goes . . . I hope you enjoy this installment for 2019 as we advance into the new decade beginning with 2020.

IF TREES COULD TALK

As many of you know, also aligned with many of you, I love big trees (Photo 1). Trees often outlive humans; many outlive generations of humans. The longevity of trees is why we are essentially their caretakers for future generations to enjoy, much like it is prudent for us to maintain historical sites or the Constitution of the United States for future generations to benefit. Unfortunately, because the world is becoming a smaller place each year and due to our world trading practices, we are introducing exotic, deadly pests and diseases at an unparalleled pace. Primarily due to their lack of evolution with each other, our native plants possess little to no resistance to these exotics. As we destroy many genera of trees and other plants, we are severely impacting our plant diversity. I think most of us would agree that the more diversity we have, the richer our environment becomes. If the monarchs of trees could talk, I believe we'd learn so much from them.

Photo 1: This large old willow resides in Traverse City, Michigan on the old mental hospital grounds now called the Traverse City Commons.

Partridge Creek Mall Bur Oak: This large bur oak resided at its site for 100's of years before the Partridge Creek Mall in Sterling Heights, Michigan was established (Photo 2A). The East Coast designers of the mall and accompanying landscape left plenty of undisturbed room for this large tree. Unfortunately, the grade of the terrain was changed on three sides. Hence, the area around the tree did not drain properly after precipitation, eventually causing decline and death of the tree. With the decline, the Two-Lined Chestnut Borer also attacked the tree. The mall administration had used the image of the large tree in their logo, established a plaque (Photo 2B) on the top of the wall in Photo 2A (right), and insured the tree for One-Million dollars, which they presumably collected after I wrote a report and pronounced the tree dead several years ago. The plaque (Photo 2B) was educational from the standpoint of its size, and age in relation to historical events and local landmarks. This tree was dated to

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Photo 2A: The gigantic, old bur oak as it appeared at the Partridge Creek Mall in Sterling Heights when I was called out to try to save it.

Photo 2B: This educational plaque was placed on the wall (Photo 2A) to commemorate the size, age and historical significance of the tree.

Photo 2C: Taken from a video screen, this poor-quality photo shows the tree as it is being taken down by Owen Tree Service. Note that the skid steer is pushing the tree while the person operating the chain saw is moving out away from the tree.

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Photo 2D: When the tree hit the ground, the area shook like an earthquake strike as the brittle tree broke into hundreds of pieces.

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over 300 years old, having been born 100 years before Abraham Lincoln. The tree was eventually removed (Photos 2C & 2D). While declining, the tree was undoubtedly crying out, "Help me!"

Buckley Elm: This large elm near Buckley, Michigan was declared the National Champion by the Champion Tree Project in the 1990's (Photos 3A, 3B and 3C).

Photo 3A: The Buckley Elm, a National Champion, grew in this farmers corn field near Buckley, Michigan. It was left there because the farmer claimed that he didn't have a big enough chain saw to cut it down. Early stages of lethal Dutch Elm Disease can be seen in the top central crown region of the tree.

Photo 3B: A slightly trick photo as I stood behind the tree a short distance, to over-emphasize the size of the tree.

Unfortunately, it contracted Dutch Elm Disease around 2000. My associates and I tried to reverse the decline of the tree, but as we expected, many of these trees are almost impossible to save once they have become infected with a lethal, introduced disease. Rainbow Tree Care out of Minnesota graciously donated the fungicidal product even though our effort turned out to be fruitless.

Champion Ash: I frequently use photos of this Champion Ash Tree located near Elk Rapids, Michigan as my opening photo in my lectures and workshops (Photo 4A). When I was alerted to the tree after my discovery of the Emerald Ash Borer in North America in 2002, I learned that a couple had bought the property in the early 1950's "***just because of the tree.***" Several years ago, the elderly couple, now in their late 80's and early 90's moved to a nursing home. Subsequently,

Photo 3C: Here, Gary Kuhlman (Northern Tree Doctor) and I tried to save the tree but couldn't, demonstrating the lethality of the exotic, introduced Dutch Elm Disease fungus.

Photo 3D: All that was left of the Buckley Elm as of 2011.

Photos 4A & 4B: I frequently use photos of this Champion Ash in my programs. I guess you could say I'm a Tree Hugger (4B).

a young couple from the Grand Rapids area bought the property as their northern summer cottage "***just because of the tree***" . . . demonstrating the generational aspects of trees. Measuring over 7 feet in diameter, the tree is being preserved from attacks by the Emerald Ash Borer by the generous efforts of Arborjet, Inc.

Moreton Bay Fig: Karen, my significant other, and I used to occasionally travel to California to visit her Godparents who lived near San Luis Obispo. In flying into Santa Barbara, I usually visited this Moreton Bay Fig (Photo 5A and 5B). A story that was told to me by locals is that a number of years ago, the state was planning to alter the Pacific Coast Highway 101, which ran very close to the tree. According to the proposed engineering alteration design of the highway, the tree would have to be removed. There was such an outcry from the public that people literally chained themselves to the tree (it must've taken a lot of chain!). The state relented and the

Photos 5A & 5B: The Moreton Bay Fig in Santa Barbara, California is huge by any standard. Not especially tall but with a large spread (5A), its trunk is quite impressive (5B).

tree was preserved. While the tree appears gigantic, believe it or not, the seedling of this tree was brought from Australia in the late 1800's, dating the tree's age to only a little over 120 years.

SELF-PROMOTION

Growing up on the family farm, I had a close association with many varieties of animals, whether they were pigs, ducks, chickens or cattle, etc. (Photo 6). As related previously, I raised steers from a young age through high school as 4-H Projects to raise money for my college fund. I would select a baby calf and raise it over the next year until it had reached a level of maturity, generally around 1100-1200 lbs. and then would take it to the county fair to show and sell (Photo 7). Imagine raising a steer from a baby calf,

Photo 6: When growing up on the family farm in central Ohio, I didn't have a horse, so I improvised with my pet pig.

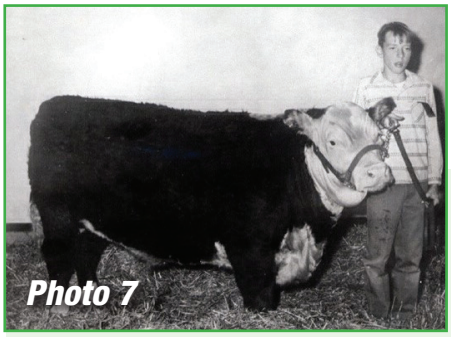

Photo 7: I raised this 1200 lb. steer from a baby calf to be shown at the Delaware County Fair, also famous as the home of the Little Brown Jug (horse harness racing).

taming it essentially as your pet to become halter-trained so that it could be shown at the county fair as a large animal that weighed well over 10X what the average youth weighed! The saddest day always came when I had to say goodbye to my friend and send him to the slaughterhouse. It was hard and on many of those events, I cried. I suppose you could say that I'm a wimp when it comes to animals . . . and trees. I prefer to believe bacon and hamburger come from the grocery store.

Although I'm probably not as big of a supporter of PETA as I should be, I hate to see animals (and trees) abused or suffer. So, I have occasionally rescued animals. Let me introduce you to Tuxedo ("Tux"-Photo 8). I rescued Tux from a garbage pit as a scrawny, little kitten trying to survive on anything he could find to eat, even rotten fruits and vegetables. Under my "care," he ballooned to over 30 lbs.; he's the first cat I've ever encountered who was not self-regulating when it came to food, probably due to his harsh, starving

Photo 8: My cat, Tuxedo, displays this self-portrait, which he hopes will land him in the spotlight along with the likes of Jane Fonda and other celebs who advertise their various weight-loss programs.

kittenhood. However, even though he could not regulate his gluttony for food very well, I swear Tux is smarter than most people. He's become quite an entrepreneur. In order to try to earn money to support his lavish adopted lifestyle, he has written a book on his weight-loss program which entails eating only small fruits, like raspberries. With his new diet, he now weighs a svelte 19 lbs. six ounces. In this self-portrait (Photo 8), where he dressed up in his finest spats and white silk kerchief, he hopes to promote his new book and entice Driscoll to hire him on as their promoter. He got the idea from those crazy commercials where Liberty Mutual Insurance features an emu and Geico Insurance features that darn cute gecko.

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AM I A CAR COLLECTOR IF I'M A "BOTTOM FEEDER?"

Sometimes in casual conversation with friends or new acquaintances, they discover I'm a "car collector" . . . well, of sorts. They often ask, "What do you have?" "Do you have an old Mustang?" "A Porsche?" "A Corvette?" My response is usually, "No, I'm a bottom feeder". I tell them I collect cars nobody else wants. They invariably then ask, "What, Volkswagen?" Eventually, I end up disclosing my brand – AMC (American Motors Corporation). For the younger generations, many have never heard of AMC and wonder what it stands for. Older generations often wonder "Why?!?!" Invariably, I launch into my lecture. "Did you know that AMC was created from a merger of the stellar Nash Motors and Hudson car companies back in 1954?" "Do you know that AMC won all the fuel economy competitions during the 1950's and 1960's?" "Do you know that AMC was the first company to make dual braking systems standard for safety, later mandated by the government for all auto companies?" "Did you know that AMC pioneered unibody construction (no frame) for mass production – stronger in strength than body on frame design, less prone to rattle, and lighter in weight . . . which all automobiles and most SUVs possess today?"

Photo 9: I grew up with and learned to drive in our 1960 (AMC) Rambler Rebel. This photo, taken in May 1967, is the only one I have of that old car that stimulated my attachment to AMC products. The car survived a tornado on Palm Sunday 1965, that destroyed our house we were living in at the time. Note the subdued fins that were exaggerated on most cars of the era.

As time goes by, my choice of "collector cars," if you could call them that, seems to be becoming more acceptable to my friends and colleagues. You see, I learned to drive in a 1960 Rambler Rebel (Photo 9). My brother (who is 10 years older than me) and I each drove this car through high school. It was durable, reliable and economical . . . and with a small 250 c.i V-8, fairly fast. Another feature that Ramblers were known for is that the front seats would recline to form a bed, for those who are traveling or, perhaps, other reasons (we won't go there!). The only problem was that people made fun of my Rambler. If you didn't have a muscle car or a 3-ton gas hog, you were not considered part of the "In-Crowd." That strengthened my resolve that Ramblers were just fine. I didn't need to follow the crowd, and never have.

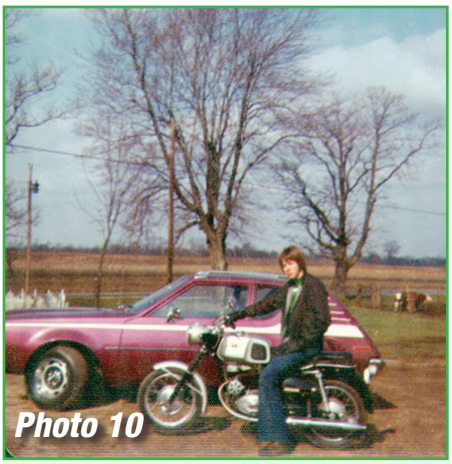

Photo 10: This is a photo of my brand new 1972 Gremlin while I am sitting astride a motorcycle I was riding at the time. There weren't many cars around like it. I drove that car for 12+ years and put 140,000 miles on it, a lot of miles for those days when cars were often derided as only lasting several years.

I worked on the family farm from childhood up through high school and even into college. I never got paid; it was just considered normal for growing up on a farm. So, in addition to raising steers to support my college fund, my parents had planned to help support my college education in repayment for all those years of hard work. In 1971, my parents approached with a proposal – if I would stay home and work on the family farm for two more years while commuting to the local branch of Ohio State University rather than moving to the main campus in Columbus, they would buy me a new car. It just had to be cheap. For me at the time, because of my affinity for AMC products, I thought the Gremlin was pretty flashy (Photo 10). Actually, I thought the Gremlin was one of the ugliest cars I had ever seen until I saw the factory optional "X Package" (mag wheels, fat tires and stripes), which, at least for me, transformed the car into something like a work of art. I drove that Gremmie for 12 years, put 140,000 miles on it and subsequently retired it to the barn. In my "barn find" 28 years later, I got that purple machine out of the barn for its 40th Birthday, not quite sure what I'd find. After some cleaning and minor repairs, I took it to several parades and car shows (Photo 11) where it garnered quite a bit of attention compared to all those common, look-alike Mustangs and Camaros. Invariably, when people find out about my small hobby, they ask, "Do you have one of those . . . uh . . . you know . . . uh . . . that ugly car . . . ah . . . what's it called?" I reply, "You mean a Pacer? Yes I do" (Photo 12). Jokers often refer to the thing as the George Jetson mobile, for those who are old enough to remember that popular TV program. The nice thing about collecting/owning a couple AMC cars is that they are relatively inexpensive to buy (still), they are inexpensive to insure, and they are unique.

Photo 11: My Gremmie 40 years later after I found it in my barn as my "barn find." It looked pretty good from a distance and runs pretty good given that it was never restored or overhauled. In just a couple of years, I'll be celebrating 50 years or one-half century with the car.

Photo 12: Yes, if you're an AMC nut like me, you gotta have a Pacer, probably in competition with the Gremlin as the most recognizable AMC product ever produced. The millennials and younger generations definitely like these cars more than they do the Mustangs, Cameros and GTOs.

As the AMC commercial used to say, "You don't see yourself coming and going".

Of interest today, when all those young drivers of those ugly Elements and Scions, etc., see the Gremlin or Pacer, they almost always say, "I'd love to own one of those." You see, I've joined the "hip crowd" after all!!!!

FAMILY MATTERS

One of the aspects I dread at this time of year is when during family get-togethers, an Uncle Bob or Cousin Joan sputters some critical remark about those "Liberals" or "Communist Republicans." Or, all those so and so (fill in the blank) people are going to Hell if they don't have the same religious beliefs that someone else does. I've never seen the country more divided in my lifetime as I do now. I have often wondered about other times in American history when there might have been such divisiveness in the country. Perhaps the most polarized time in our history was the American Civil War when brothers sometimes fought on opposite sides, and sometimes (gulp!!) killed one another. As President Lincoln said, "A house divided against itself cannot stand." As an advocate of history, partly out of interest and partly to learn from the past and hopefully prevent mistakes in our future, I suspect another contentious period was our War for Independence with the British Empire in the 1700's. Apparently, many "Americans" wanted to remain "British Subjects" and did not want to fight for independence. If I hadn't read history, I would probably have assumed that all "Americans" back then wanted to be independent from Great Britain. In the 1930's, Hitler divided Germany by attacking certain groups of people (Jews, Gypsies, etc.) and vilifying the press. This led to the cataclysmic World War II, when millions of people were killed.

If we truly believe in the U.S. Constitution, representing the oldest Democratic Republic in the World, then, it is my belief that we need to respect people's freedoms whether those freedoms are religious, sexual orientation or whatever other nature . . . and not try to condemn or isolate certain races or groups of people for whatever reasons for which we as individuals might not agree. Over many years, I have learned that many people are so entrenched in their beliefs and will not listen to any facts or the truth no matter what their recalcitrant leanings are. So, during these wondrous Holidays, when we are supposed to be celebrating various aspects of our country and religious beliefs, I think it is best to not make controversial statements during a family or friend get-together or be drawn into conversations that can only make us more estranged from one another. So, when Uncle Bob makes some outrageous comment off the cuff just to get something off his chest or to prove his view is the only correct one about certain groups of people or about politics, I think it might be best to say, "Please pass the gravy." After all, in the long haul and as Americans, "Family Matters."

Happy Holidays!

Dr. David Roberts has retired from Michigan State University but intends to remain active with the industry. He is CEO and CBW (Chief Bottle Washer) for The Plant Doctor, LLC. Contact information: 248/320-7124 and treedoctordave@gmail.com.