



**EDITORIAL**

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# The Legacy of Trees

Human nature and mother nature are more intertwined than we often realize.

**A**s an anthropologist, I am fascinated by the role of trees in our culture. Even before we knew the science of oxygen and carbon dioxide exchange, the symbiotic dependence between trees and humans gave us a close, reciprocal relationship.

People like trees. Oh, a few don't like to rake leaves, or complain about fruit staining their sidewalks, but overall, people like to have trees around. I have my own theory about why.

Humans come into contact with living things all the time. We have gardens of plants that may live a year, pets that may live to be decades old, and of course we have other people, who may live to near 80 or so. But trees are different. They are the oldest living things that people see and touch every day.

Trees put human life in perspective. Trees planted by our grandparents can provide shade and beauty in our lives, and those of our children. A tree you plant today could clean the air and water for your grandchildren and great-grandchildren. They were here long before us, and will long outlive us. They are our living connections to both past and future.

This connection defines the nature of forestry, both as a science, and in practice. Years ago, I read about the Oxford University entomology class that discovered extensive insect damage in its dining hall ceiling beams. After university officials fretted and argued, the university forester was brought in. He then announced, to the surprise of all, that university foresters down through the ages had been protecting and maintaining a grove of trees for the express purpose of replacing the beams in the dining hall. Who but foresters would think that far in advance?

We also plant trees as memorials that will live far beyond those we commemorate, and even beyond those of us who plant them. They are the long-living, natural reflection of us; they change and grow, thrive or wither, live then die. Just like us.

This past September, I attended a commemorative event in Shanksville, PA, the town near where Flight 93 crashed on the morning of September 11, 2001. Plans by the National Park Foundation and

National Park Service are underway for a permanent memorial to honor those heroes. AMERICAN FORESTS, with the US Forest Service, has committed to raise the funds to plant thousands of trees in this new National Memorial. Like the Pentagon Memorial and the grove of trees we planted with HSH Prince Albert II of Monaco in New York City, these trees will be living memorials to commemorate the 40 heroes, the passengers and crew, of the ill-fated flight.

Trees are present even in our religions, and have played integral roles in human folklore since the dawn of humanity. A Norse legend says that the first man was created from the branches and flesh of the ash tree. In early teachings, the aspen quaked with grief and remorse at being used to build Christ's crucifix. The Jews celebrate Tu B'Shevat, the yearly date for reckoning the age of trees for purposes of taxes, and of the fruit reserved for God. In the Koran, trees are characterized as a gift from the deity. Beyond their practical uses, there is something about trees that symbolize many things to many cultures across the globe. This lore reflects that unique, symbiotic relationship between trees and people that, at some level, we have always understood and valued.

As we near the holiday season this year, think about the legacy of AMERICAN FORESTS, now entering its 135th year of work. The need for replanting and management of our forests is even greater now. We have planted millions of trees, and are committed to planting millions more, for these common goals: to improve, to heal, to unite, to remember. Please consider making a contribution to help us continue that legacy. Plant trees for your loved ones as holiday gifts, or give the gift of a historic tree, so friends can plant a piece of history in their backyard.

Why do you like trees? For their beauty, strength, shade, or the ecosystem services that make human life possible? Whatever your preference, we have this appreciation in common. Help us ensure that our nation's trees and forests will grow and thrive beyond our time, and instill the same love and appreciation in generations to come.

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