

Allie Morgan
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Nature Writing
Vignette #1

Oak Meditation

It is a convergence of the present and the past.

Out here, on a crisp October day among the trees and drifts of fallen leaves, I feel most present, most myself. The yellowed leaves that spiral slowly down, alighting softly near my feet, make me conscious of the time, the day, the season. It is 4:00 pm, Friday, October 24th, fall in Minnesota – and for the first time in many days I feel like I can breathe.

The trees around the path are tall and slender, elegantly upright with branches reaching collectively toward the sun. They do not really belong in former prairie land, but they've been here much longer than I have so it seems rude to wish them away. As I walk, though, it's hard not think about the expanse of grasses that once covered this place. I won't pretend it's not enjoyable to walk among the trees and their riot of falling foliage. Still, they are almost too straight, too tall, too perfectly trained to strain rigidly in the direction of the light, like a well-trained arbor army. They do not fit with the undulating prairie they once invaded.

But there, around a corner, are two massive Bur Oaks. They are thick, dark, and contorted, and despite their solidity, they possess a sense of movement. They remind me of those ridiculous inflatable stick men – “air dancers,” I think they're called – that writhe violently in front of radio station booths at promo events. If the dancers were frozen when bent nearly double, their arms and strips of hair twisting wildly, and turned into a tree, the Bur Oak would be it.

It is easy to image them, firmly rooted and gnarled, spreading outward over the vanished waves of grass. They have been here maybe 300 years, and the mention of an old photo of a Model T driving between these same two individuals, nearly full-grown even then, makes me feel very young and suddenly reverent.

Now, the unusually noble trees are walled in by others that seem like oversized toothpicks. Their leaves are beautiful, yes, but they seem rigid and breakable, unlike my Bur Oaks. *They* are enduring yet flexible, venerable yet affable, imposing yet almost lost amidst the young show-offs that fill the canopy and cover the ground and dark oaks with their kaleidoscope of colors. The oak trees are a defiant reminder of the past. Standing here between long-lived trees from long-lost times, I feel both a connection and a powerful sense of awe. I hope that they outlast everything here.