

By FARRIN A. ROSENTHAL
FEB. 28, 2020

I didn't know how much I loved her until she was gone.

She was tall, really tall. I'm 6 feet, yet she towered above me. She could have played basketball in her youth if she were able. But the game had yet to be invented.

Not only was she tall, but she was curvy in all the right places, if you know what I mean. (Please bear with me before you think me some sort of chauvinist.) I wasn't the only one who thought so. She had devotees all over the neighborhood.

I know it's not polite to discuss one's age, but she was also old; I mean, really old.

But that only made me admire her that much more.

The fascinating thing was that the vast age difference between us didn't matter at all.

You are only as old as you feel, and she was still incredibly healthy and robust for her age.

But I'm getting ahead of myself. Let me go back to when it all started. Fittingly enough, it was on Valentine's Day 2010, the day I moved to Chatsworth, tucked in the northwest corner of the San Fernando Valley. It's a place I affectionately call "Hell on Earth" for the numerous scorching 100-plus degree summer days.

She lived across the street and took the heat in stride, unlike me, who retreated daily to the comfort of my indoor air conditioning.

I don't consider myself especially lucky, but I was blessed to have seen her every day for almost 10 years.

Her stamina was incredible. Heat didn't faze her, nor did the cold. Even though we were both born and raised in the Los Angeles area, I hate the cold. The

spoiled Angeleno that I am thinks 60 degrees is freezing. So during winters, I was in bed tucked under layers of blankets, nice and snug, while she thrived without so much as a jacket. Yes, I was jealous.

And don't even get me started about the rare times it actually rained in Los Angeles. We can go seven or eight months or more without a drop. When it does fall, you won't find me frolicking in the wet stuff, but she loved the rain, couldn't get enough.

But I digress. Back to the present. On the morning of Dec. 24, a loud noise startled me awake. Had Santa and his reindeer come early? No. It was the rip-roar of a chainsaw. Quite an annoying sound.

Yet I didn't really think much of it, other than the early hour, a little after 7 a.m. Not too unusual. Many people were trimming at the time, trying to avoid more damage after a big Santa Ana windstorms.

But as the chainsaw continued to roar throughout the morning, I knew something was different, something not quite right.

Then I looked outside and saw her. I thought it might still be OK, perhaps her condition was not that serious. But after a break for Christmas, the chainsaw resumed, and I knew she was in trouble.

The chainsaw roared and roared, and cut and cut, until there was nothing left.

It took four full days to bring her down and almost 10 years for me to realize I loved a tree.

To be exact, she was a pine tree and stood well over 75 feet. She was a majestic, glorious tree, whose trunk spanned a good 5 or 6 feet across, suggesting an age of more than a century. She may even have been born around the time Chatsworth was founded more than 130 years ago, in 1888. By the way, basketball was invented in 1891.

She lived a long, healthy life — one we can all hope for but one tragically cut short. I don't know why. As I say, she looked healthy to me. Pine trees can live

200 years, so who knows how many more she could have enjoyed living in the front yard across the street. In Los Angeles, only a few tree species enjoy the protection of the law. The future reflects how we treat the past. Maybe some things are worth saving.

Although she is gone now, she still reminds me that we can find love in the most unlikely of places. I wonder whether she knew the many lives she touched. She was a neighborhood icon, loved by many, and I, for one, will miss her.

The author is a Los Angeles-based screenwriter. He is on Twitter @ih8mondaysmovie