

Early this morning during the Fourth Watch an unusual thing happened; the story of the mesquite wood which is to be made into the high-boy dresser I am making for my daughter, and secondly, a group of my friends coming to the screen at the same time. Larry, 60 years old, son of a Houston prostitute, rode hard and put up wet; Vicki, an orphan, used, abused, who just lost her only son; Henry, back from doing several years hard labor for dealing. They *will* get the message, because I "saw" the Spirit in them. The story begins with a 5 foot by 8" piece of mesquite that has beautiful birdseye grain. This will be made into a drawer front that will be on the front to be seen and admired.

This particular mesquite was over a hundred years old when a hurricane blew it down. Being 29" in diameter, it had to have been one of the very first mesquite seeds carried from Mexico during the late 1800s cattle drives. It preceded any road, nearly all houses, and had seen many a change in the area. Being old it needed to be harvested and made into its final purpose. It had stood out in the open, on the side of a road right-of-way, exposed to all sorts of abuse. Mowers had knocked off huge pieces of bark. The tree wept, and slowly began to heal itself, closing up the gaping hole. Winds had blown it so that it was bent over from time to time. Borers had invaded its inner cadmium, sucking the sap out and causing it to lose growth for a while. Its top had been blown off many times, causing it to form new branches and forks in the tree. (The forks are where the spectacular grain is formed). Ground rot had come up from the bottom, causing more stress.

When I severed the trunk from the roots, it essentially "died". I had the tree cut into planks of needed dimensions; some 2/4, some 4/4, some 5/4. From Pearsall, TX, it was hauled to my ranch where I would use it. Being rough cut, I had to plane it, cutting off the rough edges, sometimes two-three times. I then ripped it to be straight and square.

Still more work to be done, I mortised the ends to fit with other boards of lesser beauty, but nonetheless strong and themselves too, chosen for their individual purpose. Once sawed, ripped, planed, joined, sawed, trimmed, mortised and put with their prettiest side out, all joined and fitted, I glued and screwed them together. Finally I put oil on them, soaking the first coat for a while. The second, third and tenth coats were all sanded lightly at first, then less and less violently hand-rubbed to bring out the sparkles and light-bands.

It was the long, drawn-out periods of trials that made the plank beautiful. Being bent horribly, repeatedly by the wind is what gave it the birds-eye grain, an extraordinary and unique character. Standing alone, wind-swept, abused, torn, attacked from above, the side and from below, is what gave the drawer-front board its beauty. If it had stood with others receiving the support of the crowd, it would have grown tall and luxuriant, but it would have straight, ordinary, and undifferentiated grain. Fit for a purpose nonetheless, but little exceptional beauty. It would be relegated to the hidden structural parts. *I recognized this potential when I saw the tree.*

After all the initial stages of violence to it, the plank has stayed in my old barn for seven years. There it has been kept dry and protected, until I will decide where it would be used and appreciated, at least for a while.

This story has not been written for history's sake; instead, nearly every item, act and facet is a simile of someone's life. *We* are the Tree. The Most High sees our potential for a thing of beauty and purpose. Dare we allow Him to shape us?

Ben-Issachar

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