

crooked letter 16: Shelter

I moved back to North Central Florida because I missed the landscape. I missed the trees. There were other reasons, of course. Reasons like: my firm conviction that Florida needs sex radical-politico-nonprofit-art-freaks way more than San Francisco, my life being in the toilet bowl after years of suffering from major depression and a seven year love relationship ending during the dot.com boom making it next to impossible to find an affordable flat in the city.

But my most airy-fairy-mystic reason was that I find oak trees dripping in Spanish moss soothing. I may- like today- be having a grumbly, want to smash people in the face sort of day, and I will look up from my work and out the window and see the trees. Their green leaves contrasting against a blue January sky calm me. (Sunny winters were another reason I moved back).

I lived in San Francisco for four years and while there is much beauty there- the West is majestic- I missed, I ached for the shelter of sprawling, twisted oak trees, trees that lose their leaves not in the fall, but in the early spring when new growth pushes the old off. I love Florida trees. They soothe me. They calm me. They hold my history.

I live in the house I grew up in. Trees surround my house. In my backyard is a gorgeous, huge, hundred year old oak. I played outside all day long in its shade and never got sunburned. I remember the day that my uncle scooted across one of its large, thick branches- a good twenty-five feet up- to tie the thick, coarse black rope for a tire swing. I spent hours spinning in that swing; blue sky and leaf-covered branches blurring together as I whipped round and round.

People complain that Florida does not have proper seasons. I prefer the slow, subtle signs that mark time's passage here in North Central Florida. I know it is spring by the piles of brown leaves in my yard and the brilliant, new green color on the trees. As spring shifts into summer, the fresh, young green darkens. During the almost daily afternoon thunderstorms, I can bike down tree canopied streets and not get quite as soaked. While a very few trees put on a fireworks show of colors before leaves fall, the leaves of the oak trees cling to their branches and resolutely remain green. And in our very brief winter, the trees that do lose their leaves give the oak trees space to claim the sky.

I plan to spend the next few years traveling and my artistic ambitions may mean I need to leave Gainesville. I delight in discovering new landscapes. I have found beauty in every one I have seen, but I love the scraggly, prickly beauty of North Central Florida best. It is my home. As I roam, I will miss the trees' shelter.