

## I Think I Cried A Lot

by Darrin Deany

My dad tore down the tree house this summer. He explained to the many kids that straddled their bikes below how unsafe it was becoming, that he was doing it for their safety. Then he chuckled some stale one-liner that fathers are known for, to ease the blow. As I watched from the back window of our house, I couldn't help but feel bad for the kids, but most of all, I felt bad for myself. Because along with the shingles and boards that came crashing to the ground were pieces of my childhood.

I couldn't believe the irony in what I was witnessing. After so many years as the supplier of security and safety to us kids, the tree house that my friends and I built was being condemned for being unsafe. For all those years, our tree house was just that, OURS. No grown-ups were allowed or would even dare climb the flimsy, wooden steps nailed to the trunk of the old oak tree which stood alone in the middle of the vacant lot. Kids from other neighborhoods weren't even invited. The tree house was ours.

The tree house was a place to meet up with the guys, a place to hide from your parents, or at least get away from the stale one-liners for a while. There, we could do all the things that we couldn't do at home. We could cuss, spit, scratch ourselves anyplace we wanted, and even look at dirty magazines when someone was lucky enough to swipe one from his older brother.

It was a nice tree house, as tree houses go. It had tall walls, it was fairly roomy and had a shingled roof to keep the rain out, or at least slow it down a little. It was high enough up the tree to keep even the bravest of girls from even thinking about venturing up, thank God! Not that they had any chance of getting in anyway, because the door was equipped with a deadbolt, and if you didn't know the secret password, you were wasting your time climbing those steps.

There were a couple other rules that had to be followed in the tree house. First of all, any secrets told inside could not be taken outside the tree house. Then there was the "no girls" rule which, as us guys got a little older, changed into the "no fat girls" rule.

As my friends and I did get older, our first voluntary contact with the opposite sex took place in our tree house. We started with games like "Spin the Bottle" and "Truth or Dare" then, becoming more brave, moved to games like "Strip Poker" and "Postman" (one of my personal favorites). All of us owe our first kisses to our tree house. It was the same girl for all of us, Jill sombody, and afterward we all walked home together and laughed about who got the most spit on his lips.

One day, while mowing my yard, I found a new-born baby rabbit. I placed it in a small box and took it up to the tree house. The next two days, I sprinted home from school to see my new little friend, taking him lettuce leaves and pieces of carrots, which for some reason, he wouldn't eat. The third day, I found the rabbit with a bloated belly, making whimpering noises, much like a puppy would. I held him in my hands until late at night, praying he wouldn't die. My dad came out with a flashlight and found me sleeping in the corner of the tree house, with a dead rabbit in my hands.

I remember asking my dad why the poor thing had to die. That night, I don't remember sleeping at all. I think I cried a lot.

These memories, happy and sad, are very special to me and I owe them all to our tree house. Nowhere else could we do the things that all kids should do. Nowhere else could we not get caught doing them. Nowhere else could we share so many secrets. Nowhere else could we feel so independent, so isolated, so secure. Nowhere else was a kid so much a kid, and a parent just a memory.

Unsafe? Maybe, but I couldn't help but imagine myself as a kid, looking up as someone's father tears down the one thing that once protected kids like me from parents like him. For a second I hated my father, then I just felt sorry for the kids around the tree. Maybe there would be more tree houses for them in their futures, maybe just more stale one-liners.

My mother, noticing me staring out the window, asked, "Why don't you go out and help your dad?"

I didn't answer. I walked into my room and closed the door. I was very sad. Sad for the baby rabbit, sad for the kids on their bikes, and most of all, sad because my childhood, so much like our tree house, is gone because of age.

I lay alone on my bed. I think I cried a lot.