

LEGACY FOREST

Circa 2004:

As I've been a life long lover of Nature, and in particular, trees, I had the idea to create a Forest in a public park: a living, breathing, growing, 'art installation,' if you will.

The North end of my a multi acre property, at the time, abutted the South end of the beautiful 55 acre Felicita County Park, Escondido, CA, replete with a year round creek streaming through the middle of it large outcroppings of huge granite boulders everywhere, and all situated under the canopies of countless numbers of native Oaks, Sycamores, Willows, etc. A dramatic setting, to say the least.

Desiring to formalize my idea, I noticed that the South end of the park had a huge, multi- acre, open area, devoid of any trees. It also had a high water table. This scenario made an ideal environment for planting Poplar or what are commonly called, Cottonwood, trees (so named because when they go to seed, they emit countless numbers of cottony like seeds that float like feathers in the breeze). The Poplars were an ideal choice because they're fast growing, long lived, deciduous (losing leaves in Fall), and would readily grow in the marshy ground.

Having my plan together, I decided to float it to the Head Ranger of said park. After we both did an on site survey of my proposed plan, he liked it and signed off on the project, particularly when I told him it wouldn't cost his park budget a penny!

Over the course of the next few months, I obtained and planted over forty (40) of the two most popular varieties of Poplars: the Lombardy or Nigra Poplar, which grows to 80-100 feet tall, and has a narrow, columnar configuration (you've probably seen these painted in some of impressionist master, Claude Monet's paintings, as they are ubiquitous and favored in France), and the Fremontii Poplar, which grows to almost similar heights, but has a much more traditional, or rounded crown.

Flash forward to 2017: I recently visited my grove of Poplars, which I'd not seen in some years, and was delightfully surprised to see that almost all had survived and thrived, to the point that they all made for a gorgeous, large and very dramatic forest, or stand of trees. The upside of all this is that these trees are now an integral part of the ecosystem of that area, working overtime to cleanse toxins from the air, produce pure oxygen, and provide habitat for numerous creatures.

They are also beautiful to look at as the Poplar has what's known as a 'quaking leaf,' which means that with even the slightest breeze, the leaves move back and forth in the breeze and create this ethereal shimmering effect as the sunlight plays off the leaf surfaces en masse. In Fall, all the leaves turn different shades of yellow which is also spectacular.

'Visual Valium' is my coined term for the effect that Nature, in general, and trees, in particular, have on us when and if...we will but take the time to open up our eyes and senses, and behold the ineffable beauty and grandeur of Nature and trees. I can look at a tree, and literally, in a matter of less than a minute, I am completely lost in a transcendental world of wonder and amazement, where time and space seem to fade away, and all there is is the Beauty of what I am observing and one with.

I am happy to have been able to give this gift of this legacy Poplar forest to the people of Southern California, as Felicita County Park is so popular that people come from all over just to enjoy the beauty of it's natural surroundings.

As a Naturalist and professional Arborist, I have planted thousands of trees during my life, but this was perhaps my most fun and favored project, to date.

~ Gary Walker, Landscape Artist/Designer