



It is not necessarily what one learns about trees, but what one learns from them.

The *Magic* of Trees

A day at the State Arboretum of Virginia

by Amanda S. Creasey, Outdoors Writer

This was going to be a story about trees, pure and simple — a factual story about the trees I saw at the State Arboretum of Virginia in Boyce, Va. How old are they? How big? How beautiful?

What I was not prepared for — though, perhaps I should have been — was the magic of the trees. The magic started before my friend, her baby, my dogs and I even got out of the car. It was lunchtime. We were hungry and looking to start our visit with a picnic. Ignoring our grumbling stomachs, we passed by several food trucks and vendor tents preparing for a weekend event.

Although tempted to stop, we drove by the iconic brick gate across from the herb garden, opting to get the lay

of the land before settling on a picnic site and planning for our visit. We continued down a narrow dirt road, under cotton-ball clouds adrift in a robin's-egg blue sky.

We hadn't made it very far when, from the passenger seat, I spotted it — the place I wanted to eat lunch. It was a treehouse of sorts, nestled amongst the leaves in the distance. We wound our way along the serpentine lane until we came to a small parking area. Abandoning our plan for a quick driving tour before lunch, we heeded the call of the trees, unloaded our crew and coolers, and walked down a short path to the treehouse.

Trees of all sizes and ages lined the path, their leaves shimmering slightly in the breeze. Some, presumably suffering

from a blight, had recently been cut down, stumps and logs smelling tangy and sweet in the warmth of the late morning sun. One little redbud was bedecked with colorful, sun-faded prayer flags that fluttered in the wind. I paused to investigate and found it was a memorial to some late patron, a nature lover who, in life, had found peace here.

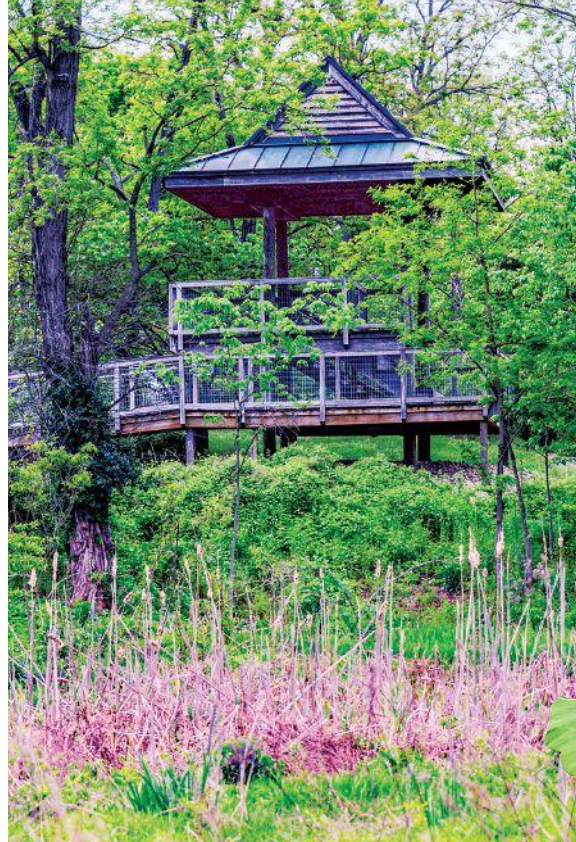
As I walked along the trail, my



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Orland E. White
Research Arboretum

co-opliving.com



Hewlett Lewis
Overlook Pavilion



Ginkgo tree

looking out over a marsh to the rolling hills. Cardinals, bluebirds and catbirds darted in and out of the sheltering tree branches. There was nowhere else I wanted to be more than in that treehouse in the fresh air with my dogs and my friend and her baby — eating strawberries in the shade of a redbud tree.

“I’d love to come back here early in the spring,” I said to my friend, imagining what it would be like to sit in this very spot when the redbud was in bloom, its delicate purple blossoms presiding over the pavilion. When we finished eating, we continued our journey.

I looked at the beautiful blue sky above. I heard the breeze whispering secrets through the green leaves on all the trees. I saw the seed pods swaying from the redbud branches, listened to the various birds calling in the boughs, felt the warm sun on my back, and watched a small bunny, still as stone, peering at us from the underbrush.

I wanted to come back in the fall, when the ginkgo grove would be golden. I wanted to come back in the winter too, when I might see the rolling hills white with snow and the barren branches gray



against a winter’s sky, the trees pleasantly exhausted from their summer’s work and preparing for spring.

With a baby on board and naptime to consider, my friend and I decided to explore the nearest trail, the Native Plant Trail, which traces a loop through wetland and meadow habitats with a slight jog into a woodland.

As we walked, I thought about the trees and their various seasons. I thought about the elderly woman and her adopted senior dogs in their current seasons of life, my dogs and I in ours, and my friend and her baby in theirs. It was then that I realized that it is not necessarily what one learns about trees, but what one learns from them. ●

friend pushing her baby in the stroller ahead, my two dogs trotting between us on their leashes, an elderly stranger happened along in the opposite direction. Stooping to pet my small dogs, she struck up a conversation about her practice of adopting senior dogs. Despite her evident advanced age, she was active, spry and energetic. After our conversation ended, she went on her way along the sun-dappled path under the canopy of trees. I walked on, reaching the treehouse a few minutes after my friend.

A sign at its base told us its name: Hewlett Lewis Overlook Pavilion. We settled at the top, taking out our strawberries and cheese, avocado and crackers, cupcakes, and water bottles. We ate our treehouse picnic nestled beside the boughs of a redbud, listening to the trill of redwing blackbirds,