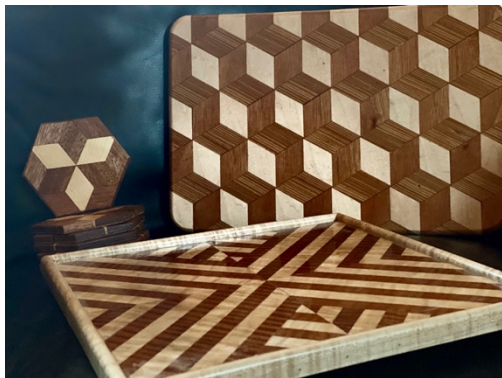


Of Lives, Trees and Memories....

The sky was a crisp winter blue, flecked with clouds—some feathery, others heavy—as if they were reminding you of that science test in elementary school where you had to name their forms. The scene invited you to look up, stay a while, enjoy, watch the clouds dance to the soft wind. To make the appeal even more inviting, it arranged the sun to greet you with its warmth basking your face, as it peeked through, just enough to not become bothersome.

Being in the south, close to the Gulf, even though it was December, the mild winter allowed you to enjoy the outdoors. Green fields and a small creek painted the countryside; the dry tree branches disguised the blueness of the sky with sharp, artistic mastery of nature at its most powerful discrepancy.



We were visiting my brother-in-law, a true artisan. He is the quiet soul who goes unnoticed and is content with this perception of him. Yet it is difficult to not find yourself in awe of his talent. I married into a family of music, artistry, entrepreneurship and love. When God was giving out talent, he didn't forget the

Boudreaux family, for certain. The



incredible woodwork Rene produces is intricate, delicate, practical and stunning. He reserves his talent for family, friends, for the deep love he feels for his wife and son, and his own love of the stories each piece of wood whispers, only to him...





I sat in the wicker chair near a tiny creek, leaned back my head, closed my eyes and felt life slow down.



My daughters took turns riding the John Deere with my husband, giggling with delight at their first tractor ride.





They discovered a tree swing and took turns flying through the sky.



They played with the dogs and cats that Rene and his family had saved, not because it's cool to have a "Rescue Dad" or "Proud Parent of a Rescue Pet" sticker on your car, but because he saw an animal in need and there was no other thing to do. You just helped



it, saved it, loved it. The tenderness here is



indisputable. Cats and dogs live in harmony. My daughter holds a bunny rabbit and her face exudes nothing but affection, tranquility and happiness. Yes, the love here was undeniable and it extended far beyond woodwork, animals or the land. It is just present within and devotedly, cheerfully offered outward.

History here is deep and magnanimous. Only a few feet away is Ma's house—my husband's grandmother's house—the house he played in as a little boy. The house where he had memories of watching the *Sound of Music* on Thanksgiving break, old country music playing on the turntable, Pa working in the yard, Ma baking pies in the kitchen, his uncle Bobby playing baseball with him. The Purple Martin bird house Pa and Uncle Bob made, still stands, honoring them for the generations of Purple Martins that have rested, nested and moved on, long after they both had passed. Memories here were abundant. And my girls were living and expanding that history.



They sat in a swing with their great-grandmother, a spunky, deeply religious, hard-working southern lady in her 90s. She makes them laugh. They love it when she calls them “Cher” (pronounced *sha*), a Cajun-French word for “sweet” or “dear”. They love the way she talks about herself in the third person, “Ma packed up some shrimp for you.” And they love the old memory of her letting them have



their first Dr. Pepper while telling them, “Drink it or wear it.” That expression stuck with them for years and they had to replicate the memory as they sat on the porch, drank the cokes she bought for them this time and they giggled, telling each other “*Drink it or wear it!*”



An impressive, iconic Southern live oak tree under which the old, creaky swing resides has seen more generations pass its grandiose guard than any of us ever will. It extends its branches in such artistic, contorted ways that you simply know, God created it with love.



One heavy bough in particular lengthens, plunges and invites the girls to have a seat and enjoy its security. But slowly the live oak relinquishes to its own maturity, its own majesty, easing into its age, watching youthful generations with admiration as it languishes yet anticipates the evening of its life. Still, life and endurance



persevere and it stands strong, steady, an emblem of the south keeping guard over all who take the time to notice. As Ralph Waldo Emerson wrote, "The creation of a thousand forests is in one acorn."



As we prepare to say goodbye, my eyes fall to the fig tree in Ma's yard. Truly it is more of a palatial and imposing fig bush. Its branches appear dry, empty, dormant. It is the middle of winter, after all. Yet at closer glance, you see it working, pushing life forward, allowing a few light green buds to slowly re-enter the world and prepare for the abundance they will soon provide. I realize what a beautiful symbol it is of our own lives: Even when life seems to lead us to struggle, strife or grief, it always leaves that hopeful green bud. Our responsibility is to find it, see it and nurture it from the ground up, so it can bear the fruit of a life well lived.

--Ivana Segvic-Boudreaux ©
January 16, 2020

An excerpt from Walt Whitman's Live Oak, With Moss (AKA "Calamus-Leaves")

*I saw in Louisiana a live-oak growing,
All alone stood it, and the moss hung down
from the branches,
Without any companion it grew there,
glistening out with joyous leaves of
dark green,
And its look, rude, unbending, lusty, made
me think of myself;
But I wondered how it could utter joyous
leaves, standing alone there without its
friend, its lover- -For I knew I could
not;
And I plucked a twig with a certain number
of leaves upon it, and twined around it
a little moss, and brought it away –
And I have placed it in sight in my
room...*

