



In Bounds: Wood Hoarding: A Natural Compulsion

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Last week over a cup of English Breakfast Tea, my father, 79 years young and I discussed life, growing old and the gradual decline of our physical attributes. We do enjoy each other's company and I am fortunate to visit with a close friend of his sage wisdom.

This particular meet and greet was prompted by the removal of a large cancerous growth in his scalp. Indeed the scar is ugly, but he took the surgery in stride and proclaimed a secondary success as the closure required some skin stretching to eliminate the excavation. In turn, this removed several wrinkles from his face. Every cloud has a silver lining I guess!

Some other news shared that day was not so bright. Recently while splitting wood with wedge and sledge hammer, he strained his left knee. Discussions with his doctor broke his heart as he was told to stop mauling wood. I can empathize with my father's disappointment for I too share with him and suffer from a common though rarely discussed compulsion. We are both wood hoarders.

Growing up on a five-plus acre wooded lot exposed me to my father's malady from an early age. It was not uncommon for him to announce on a Friday evening that, "Tomorrow we are going to split some wood!" Of course this meant that he was going to use the chain saw to down a tree and trim branches while my siblings and I hauled the brush to the burn pile. Then the Big Guy would chunk the trunk into 20-inch pieces and the labor reserves carried the sections to the splitting area.

Stacked between two live trees, the logs would be allowed to dry a bit, perhaps even into the winter when a cold snap froze the wood and facilitated splitting. Easier for my father to split that is, because the hauling and stacking of split wood were children's chores. He was exempt because he was the Wood God of Pine Tree Lake Road. We had two fireplaces in our house, and it seemed our "chore" was never completed!

My father had a "thing" about wood, wood potential, wood accumulation and wood piles. On drives through the neighborhood he would comment on declining trees and the opportunities to add to his accumulation of timber. Vacant lots were uncharted territories where we could

watch while he dropped the dead tree. And sweat as we, the child labor force, loaded the back of the "woody" station wagon with prime oak, ash or maple.

Not only did he have the eagle eye for trees, but my Dad ruled when it came to dumpster diving for kindling wood. Every home under construction held vast quantities of scrap to be surveyed, sorted, stacked, hauled and restacked at home to be used to ignite the hoarded and wor-shipped firewood. Sometimes these pieces were large enough to do home projects

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and perhaps not scraps, but I wasn't going to be the one to mention that to my Dad for he was the timber baron in our house.

After I began working at White Bear Yacht Club, a new initiative in wood hoarding took place. Under paternal mandate I was directed to seize any and all split able wood taken from the course. This to be added to the now very well-aged stacks and stacks of wood wedged between trees in our backyard. The directive was modified to exclude any and all elm wood as, and I can still see his hand description, "That wood is damn hard to split because it twists as it grows."

Soon I was scouting the WBYC property to supplement his desires. Cushman loads of bounty were carted to his property much to his delight. Some was burned, some was stacked, some was stored and to this day I still can identify logs imported for the creating of a retaining wall system of sorts. At the time I was becoming indoctrinated into the wood-hoarding compulsion and ever since I have been looking for dry timber to remedy my own addiction for firewood.

My former house had a wood-burning furnace inside. Not one of those supplemental heaters, but a grand daddy unit capable of consuming five-foot long pieces of wood, I even think I drooled when I realized the potential for woodsmanship in such a grand scale. Impressive to say, but considering the furnace was in my basement, I had no good indoor location to store daily supplies of firewood of that size. So I logged my wood into 20-inch lengths and to take my production to the next level, I purchased a log splitter.

With this investment I had made it pos-

sible to split massive amounts of firewood. Cords and cords graced my yard and created an indescribable personal pride for surely my neighbors or anyone else observing my arrangement developed wood envy (however, I think it was one of the issues that led to my first divorce). I had become my father's son, a full-fledged wood hoarder.

Actually, we are everywhere. Just drive around town and you can pick us out. Typically we have an outdoor fire pit in the back yard and a fireplace stack protruding from our roof tops. Between trees or stacked next to the garage, perhaps under an old canvas tarp, an aging half-cord waits for the beckoning of a chilly fall evening or the urge to make a smore.

Wood hoarders don't belong to any club, but we appreciate a dead or dying tree and size up amateur removal probabilities voyeuristically. Northern

Hydraulics catalogues capture our gaze as we reminisce about logs so large they defied our meager homeowner splitters and remain in

the "too big too split" pile. We ponder the value of our log piles, envy bigger hoards and consider the potential of actually selling or bartering our laborious hobby, NOT. And with mild embarrassment we look away when a non-hoarder purchases a net wrapped bundle of three logs from the gas station for five dollars

Currently I have two log piles nestled in the woods of my yard and one paltry stack by the deck door. All quite diminutive compared to my historical standards because although my wife is the most understanding person in the world, she doesn't appreciate my natural fetish. Also, I am very interested in maintaining a healthy relationship with her. What she doesn't know is that I have a monstrous pile, at least eight cords big (full man cords) behind the shop from which I supplement my deck stash! Actually I feel sad for her as she just cannot enjoy my fetish.

Alas, someday I too will be told that I must curtail my wood-hoarding habits. Like my fathers, my body will rebel against the back-breaking toil of creating an ever larger wood pile. The doctor will prescribe activities not including tree removal, log splitting and the accumulation of wood for future consumption. But you will never be able to keep this wood hoarder from dreaming of creating vast piles of drying logs. The splinter, the chaff of skin and the near miss of the hydraulic ram; the smell of exhausted petroleum, wet wood and bark fungus; the sound of crashing timber, splitting logs and the muffled chainsaw; the production of neat rows or conical piles of wood, split 20-inch pieces of wood. In my mind's eye, the wood hoarder's Mecca.