

Sample Essay of Description

The prompt to read this essay appears on p. 150 of *Acting on Words*. Study questions follow the essay. Note that Hafso's essay uses the APA system of documenting sources.

The Tree Darlene Hafso

It was just a tree. The original owners of the home, just south of us on 58th Avenue, planted the tree, a weeping birch, sometime in the late 1980s. When we moved to the neighbourhood, our family watched the daily ritual as the neighbour, a retired truck driver, tenderly watered his tree. The retired trucker was faithful with this task, especially during the hot, dry summer months. We all heard the story of the tree. It had a rough start and was somewhat neglected in the beginning of its life, until this retired trucker moved in. The nurturing of the tree became a labour of love. Over the years we watched the tree grow into a beautiful 35-foot masterpiece. The changing colors from season to season were breathtaking. People came from other neighbourhoods in our community to take family, graduation and wedding pictures with the tree as a background. The tree seemed part of all of us in this neighbourhood.

“A huge, healthy tree is a source of spiritual strength for humans. It's no wonder that people go to such lengths to preserve them” (Hole, 2001, p. 12). The tree in our neighbourhood was a source of spiritual strength. It gave the trucker a purpose in his retirement years. A few years ago this man was diagnosed with cancer and no longer able to care for his home. Though the retired trucker moved, we still see him in his front yard each day. Through the tree we have a spiritual connection with this man. The tree and its seasons represent part of his life.

Trees have been part of our neighbourhoods since the beginning of time. “And the Lord God made all kinds of trees grow out of the ground-trees that were pleasing to the eye and good for food” (Genesis 2:9a.) Some trees supply fruit and nourishment while others, as our weeping birch, provide shade and beauty. Our tree had personality. The

brilliant orange hues in the fall to the striking white frosting on the branches in the winter months were pleasing to our eyes. In the summer the tree danced gracefully showing off its dark green jagged leaves, as people in the neighborhood went “to and fro”. It also provided a home for many birds. The tree shaded the neighbour’s yard and our own yard during hot summer days.

“Old trees often evoke powerful images of our past, images as sharp as the pictures in a photo album” (Hole, 2001, p. 8) I remember growing up in southern Manitoba. The heat during the summer was intense. My brothers, cousins and I would climb many trees that surrounded our yard during the school holidays. Later in the afternoon, we sat in the shade of the trees in the cool grasses sipping Koolaid and enjoying homemade buns. Our grandparents and other immigrants from Poland and Russia planted the trees of our village during the early 1900s. Some of the seedlings, tucked away in their suitcases when they immigrated, came from the “old country.” A tour of the yard and garden was a tradition when company came from the city of Winnipeg. I hear them discussing how they saved the rain water to tenderly water their trees and plants during the hot summers. I also see the pride and happiness on their faces as they show off their labour of love. The trees and plants were part of their spiritual connection to their roots in Poland and Russia as the start new neighbourhoods in southern Manitoba.

It was just a travel trailer. The latest sleek and shiny model, a 28-foot, with a slide-out and all of the new technology like a microwave, stereo system and color television set. Just perfect for weekend trips out to the lakes to enjoy the splendor of it all, away from their new neighbourhood. The new neighbour had a dilemma. The branches of weeping birch did not accommodate the travel trailer. What to do? He made a quick study of the tree. Looks like it will have to come down. Perhaps it is not as healthy as it looks, there seems to be a split in the tree’s trunk. And the tree did come down, branch by branch, a few weeks ago on a Sunday morning, when some of the neighborhood was still sleeping. The travel trailer now stands in place of the tree.

Travel trailers are great for getting away from it all and spending time with family and friends. New friends are made touring different parts of our provinces and country. The trailers, small up-to-date homes on wheels, are part of new neighbourhoods away

from home. “There are more than five million acres of park-land in Saskatchewan that make the perfect place for a family-friendly, nature-based vacation” (Destination Saskatchewan, 2006, p. 3) This summer Saskatchewan Provincial Parks is celebrating 75 years of conserving the province’s natural and cultural heritage. What better than to enjoy the beauty of nature, parked in the cool shade of the trees in a travel trailer?

It was just a tree. “By strict definition, a tree is a tall woody plant with a single trunk supporting a leafy crown” (Hole, 2001, p. 14). But to us on 58th Avenue it was more than a tree. The tree was a friend. It grew along with the rest of the neighbourhood. At 20 years old, the tree represented some history and stability on our street. It stood firm and tall and the changing colors of the seasons spoke to us. The tree held a special place in our hearts, a source of special memories and daily spiritual strength for some of us. Just as people make up our neighborhoods and communities, trees are also part of the big picture. Trees are often the focal points of our yards. They are aesthetically pleasing and cool the environment by providing shade and absorbing carbon dioxide while giving off oxygen. People take shelter under the branches in the summer. Part of the history and pride of our prairie communities rests in the trees that have been planted by those who came before us. Trees are good.

I don’t quite understand how the loss of a tree can have such an impact on our family. It is like a death in our neighborhood. We mourn the tree. Years from now, when it is all said and done, I will not remember the travel trailer, but I am sure of one thing. I will always remember the tree.

References

Hole, Jim. Trees and shrubs. (2001.) Volume 5. St. Albert, AB. Holes Publishing

The NIV Study Bible. (2005) Concordia Publishing House, St. Louis, MO. Retrieved October 12, 2006 from www.biblegateway.com

“Your guide to Saskatchewan vacations.” Destination Saskatchewan. (Summer 2006.) Retrieved October 12, 2006 from www.saskparks.net

For Further Thinking

1. In your own words, what is the writer's controlling idea in this essay?
2. Describe the tone of this essay. What rhetorical features help create this tone (word choices, sentence patterns and repetitions, juxtapositions, pacing of key disclosures, etc)? In what ways do you think this distinctive tone reflects connections the reader has to her topic, controlling idea, research sources, and imagined reader?
3. Look more closely at the specific research sources cited. Is there anything interesting or unusual about their grouping? How deliberately chosen does each appear to be and what appears to have influenced its selection? Does a certain rhetorical principle appear to underlie the selection and use of sources?

Looking Back and Ahead

Compare “The Tree” and “Where Are You my Little Village?” (at this Chapter of this website) to each other and then to Joyce Miller’s “Night Fades” (at Chapter 8 of this website). All three seem to reflect upon the “progress myth,” the idea that humanity has evolved from primitive states to advanced ones, that we are better practically, intellectually, artistically and morally, than previous generations. Is life “getting better”? Also of relevance to this huge question are the two essays that complete the Reader (pages 504 - 513) and the discussion surrounding them.

Practice

In the style of sample outlines provided in Chapters 6 and 9, design a section-by-section outline for “The Tree,” one that could in fact have guided the writer throughout.