

We were on our way to Leroy Milling to buy sheep salt and minerals and organic chicken feed when I had a sudden need to call my cousin. We were driving by the farm where she grew up when I noticed an absence. There is a break in the thick foliage of trees and bushes along the dirt road where I always look for the hilltop view of the old Yellow Transparent tree. I didn't see it. It was such a shock that we turned around in the road and went back to the gate and walked in. Sure enough, the apple tree was nearly supine, the trunk split right down the middle to ground level. There were still green leaves on both halves, though the white-tailed deer had eaten what they could reach. There were no apples on the tree this year, but it has regularly produced—at least in alternate seasons—all through my life and long before.

Most of the old homesteads had small apple orchards. Here at Coe Creek we had a winter apple tree of some kind, two Wealthy trees, and two of the Duchess of Oldenburg variety. Only the Duchess remain, and these century-old trees once again have a big crop of apples. They will provide most of the sauce and pies we need.

But, we have never depended completely on these old pioneer orchards. Through the decades, children, birds, and other animals have distributed the seeds of countless apples throughout the roadsides, woods, and pastures. At the edge of the Big South Field are several seedling trees, misshapen and awkward to deal with, but which usually have good apples. Since the Duchess trees provide an early apple—late August or September—it is good to have these fall and winter fruits on which to rely as the growing season ends.

And then, there was the apple tree by the Apple Tree Pond. The water hole is still there, providing enough for the livestock when they are in that particular pasture, but the tree is gone. Like the newly destroyed Yellow Transparent, the apple tree by the pond was finally a victim of time. And, it was never a well-shaped, strong tree. But, the apples were delicious and were always ready just after the Duchess. We picked apples there every year for pies and to make applesauce to can and apple butter to spread on toast. So, we never lacked for that fruit so important to folks in our cold climate.

We “try” the apples from every seedling tree we see along our road or in the pastures. Often, the apples are only attractive to wildlife. Some are small, misshapen, sour, hard, or bitter. But, now and then, we find a new seedling tree that has tasty, useful fruit. Since apple seeds do not produce trees that are the same as the apple they came from, seedling trees can vary enormously in quality.

And, although a requiem for my cousin's old, well-loved Yellow Transparent tree in the middle of the Gunder Eighty is in order, there is still hope in the neighborhood. Our new—planted fourteen months ago—Yellow Transparent tree in our vegetable garden has twelve perfect apples almost ready to ripen. We removed at least that many when they were tiny, and perhaps, it is not wise to let any apples mature on so young a tree. But, we are glad we did, as they are providing continuity between the old and the new. And, we hope that this little tree, if its trunk splits down the middle sometime during the 22nd century, will have someone who has enjoyed its fruits who

can compose the requiem for it, as well.