

That was a great story last Friday about the Freedom Tree and Fred McMurray. With its death imminent, let me pass on my recollection about the birth of the Freedom Tree, or to be a bit more accurate, its adoption.

The Lakeshore Development Committee, Orrin Lee, Ray Kindler, Eileen Lund, Mae McEuen, Bob Thomas, Ed Johnson, Art Manley and me, had been successful in obtaining a "No" vote in the city election to sell the waterfront and Third Street to a Spokane developer in 1959.

I am unsure of the date, but I think it was about 1962 when KAW or Ozzie Walch or both let it be known that they wanted to develop Tubbs Hill. Access to the hill already existed coming west on Pine Street up the hill.

However, any extensive development would logically needs a road, as Tony Tubbs originally envisioned, from 4th Street south across what became McEuen Field.

One of us, most likely Art, came up with the idea to plant a tree where 4th Street south of Front came into the yet unpaved city parking lot.

Ray Kindler, County Surveyor at the time, had a bunch of young spruce trees at his home. He gave me four of them which now tower over our house on Fernan Hill.

Application was made to the city council which gave an o.k. I don't think we disclosed our objective of blockage. The support was more likely it was to have a permanent Christmas tree which in fact happened.

In the late 1950's the city had put up a cut tree on 4th Street between Front and Sherman. It had blown over killing a woman.

Whenever the planting took place, our little group attended; dug the hole and put in Ray's tree which was probably not more than eight feet tall. There was a picture taken and published in the Coeur d'Alene Press. I had a copy once, but it is long since lost.

The tree grew, thriving on Christmas decorations and was never needed as blockage.

As the story relates, in 1972 Fred McMurray was shot down in Vietnam. Fred's father Ray McMurray had been or maybe he was the Chairman of the City Planning Commission.

Someone, not us, came up with the idea of tying yellow ribbons on the tree and then the plaque as related. It was kind of like a primitive prayer ritual. When Fred turned up, I felt the ritual had worked.

We could not take any credit for the yellow ribbons or the plaque, but it was a great feeling to have this additional meaning given to our small effort.

I think Bob Thomas and Ed Johnson and I are the only ones left. Maybe one of the benches could note the beginning of the Freedom Tree.

While I will miss seeing the tree out my office windows, what you are doing in the big picture for McEuen is an achievement for beauty and public use far far exceeding the most we ever dreamed of when our small troupe placed the stop sign to developing Tubbs Hill.

Scott