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Flash Nonfiction by Don Lyman

Make Way for Another Storage Facility



There's four within a five-mile radius of where I live—two in Woburn, one in Burlington, another in Stoneham—and now one at the end of my street. Storage facilities. Big, box-shaped buildings that have sprung up all over the Boston suburbs. Places to store your extra stuff. Perfect for a consumer-driven society that thrives on buying more stuff. Or for a transient society. Public Storage. Extra Space Storage. Simply Self Storage. The one at the end of my street doesn't even have a name yet. But it's big. Three stories high. A few hundred feet long. A hundred feet wide. It replaced a field and a forest and a rock ledge and whatever creatures lived there.

For years, I drove by and saw white pines, birches, sumac, golden rod, milkweed, asters. Then one morning, just dirt. Construction equipment. A vacant lot. Everything gone. Except for one lone quaking aspen tree. A dump truck, a backhoe, a porta potty, a forty-foot-long, ten-foot-high pile of gravel, a chain-link fence—and a single tree. As I watched the storage facility grow week after week, I wondered why they left the tree. How strange that they'd preserve a single piece of the forest they destroyed.

When I drove by last week, the aspen was gone, replaced by a row of landscaped shrubs. Now, the storage facility seems complete.

Art information

- “Storage Facility Construction, 2014” (detail) © Don Lyman; used by permission.



Don Lyman is a freelance science writer, biologist, and graduate student in the Master's in Journalism program at Harvard University Extension School.

This piece began as an homage to the opening paragraph of Joan Didion's “On the Mall” from *The White Album*. Don's author photo here was taken by Matthew Lyman.

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