

Squirrel Alex reflects on life at a changing Elon

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The Pendulum

As October closes, warm days of sunshine are being replaced by shorter, cooler ones. Crispy, colored leaves are falling to cover the piles of acorns left unburied.

Alex has seen the change before, as it happens every year. This year, however, just like the year before it, seems somehow different. The changes individually are subtle, but their sums are dramatic.

Alex is a squirrel, and he lives at Elon College.

He's been here a little over three years that he can remember—squirrel memories aren't quite as extensive as that of the humans he mainly shares campus with—and he lives in one of the large oaks used to shadow graduation every year. What he lacks in memory, though, Alex seems to make up for in his insight.

Perhaps this vision comes from his lifestyle. While most of the humans are caught up in money and responsibility, Alex is only looking to do what he always does: find acorns, eat acorns, bury acorns. Thus, he spends much of his time observing and pondering his surroundings.

And if you ask Alex about Elon, his home for these three re-

membered years, he can only describe it as different. His little rodent brain can't analyze causes and blueprints and statistics, but he knows when things are out of character with tradition. He can see when things are not as he has ever known them to be.

About three weeks ago, Alex's life was tragically changed. A great oak tree, one of the largest to tower near West hall was removed completely. He didn't live in the tree, though many of his family did, but he often climbed to the tops of its branches to look over the campus.

Alex could sit in that tree all day and marvel at the way things had changed across the campus. Giant buildings that so recently had not been present at all now dominated the landscape. Multitudes of students and cars that never seemed to be there before, at least not in such great number, covered what used to seem such a silent Elon. Sidewalks had moved. Trees were cut down, and youthful saplings were planted in their place.

Amongst all the change, however, Alex knew the loss of the oak tree was the metaphor for it all. Through campus fires and numerous presidents (both national and collegiate), this tree had survived. Why, Alex could even remember

several great storms in his three short years that had failed to topple it. Though the tree had stood for dozens of years, outliving the buildings and beings that walked beneath, it was now gone, seemingly without cause or merit.

Squirrels are very big on tradition. The elder squirrels in every family always pass down from generation to generation the legacy that is a pattern for life. Find acorns. Eat acorns. Bury acorns. Brutally simple, it's all a squirrel needs.

That's why Alex is so worried about the loss of the big oak tree. Sure, he knows there are dozens more like it that he and his friends can inhabit. Certainly enough nuts exist to support them for as long as they care to stay.

Why, though, after a hundred years is the oak no longer welcome at Elon?

Alex says he's heard the humans say it's all a part of "the plan," this great intangible vision that seems to have consumed them all and made them lose sight of what Elon really is supposed to be.

Stadiums and new buildings and a spiffy new mascot aren't really the things that make Elon the college it has always aspired to be, says Alex. In fact, those things make Elon always what it struggled not to be: a carbon-copy college.



Courtesy Bob's Backyard Squirrels

Alex ponders the future of Elon from his perch in a big oak tree outside of Virginia hall.

Alex knows he can't do anything about the changes for they are much bigger than him. Even if he gathered his extensive squirrel family and friends and banned together, nothing would come of his revolt.

So Alex spends his days in a silent sadness as he works the acorn rounds of Elon. Sure, he knows he will not live forever. But soon he will be the elder squirrel and have to tell the youth about the world's priorities: Find acorns. Eat acorns. Bury acorns.

Or, maybe now that's not enough. One tree at a time, the world of Elon is changing. A field becomes a lot and a forest becomes a building. Now, it appears, what worked so well for a hundred years must be changed.

Granted, the leaves on the ground still look the same. The autumn air still smells as brisk. But Alex the squirrel feels the bitter changes molding his world. If only, he wishes, humans making those changes could appreciate them too.

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